INSIDE THE PETER GREEN GUITAR AUCTION P66

Guitarist

Issue 499

JULY 2023

"IT IS A UNIQUE GUITAR, A BLESSED PIECE OF WOOD..."

Fender REISSUES

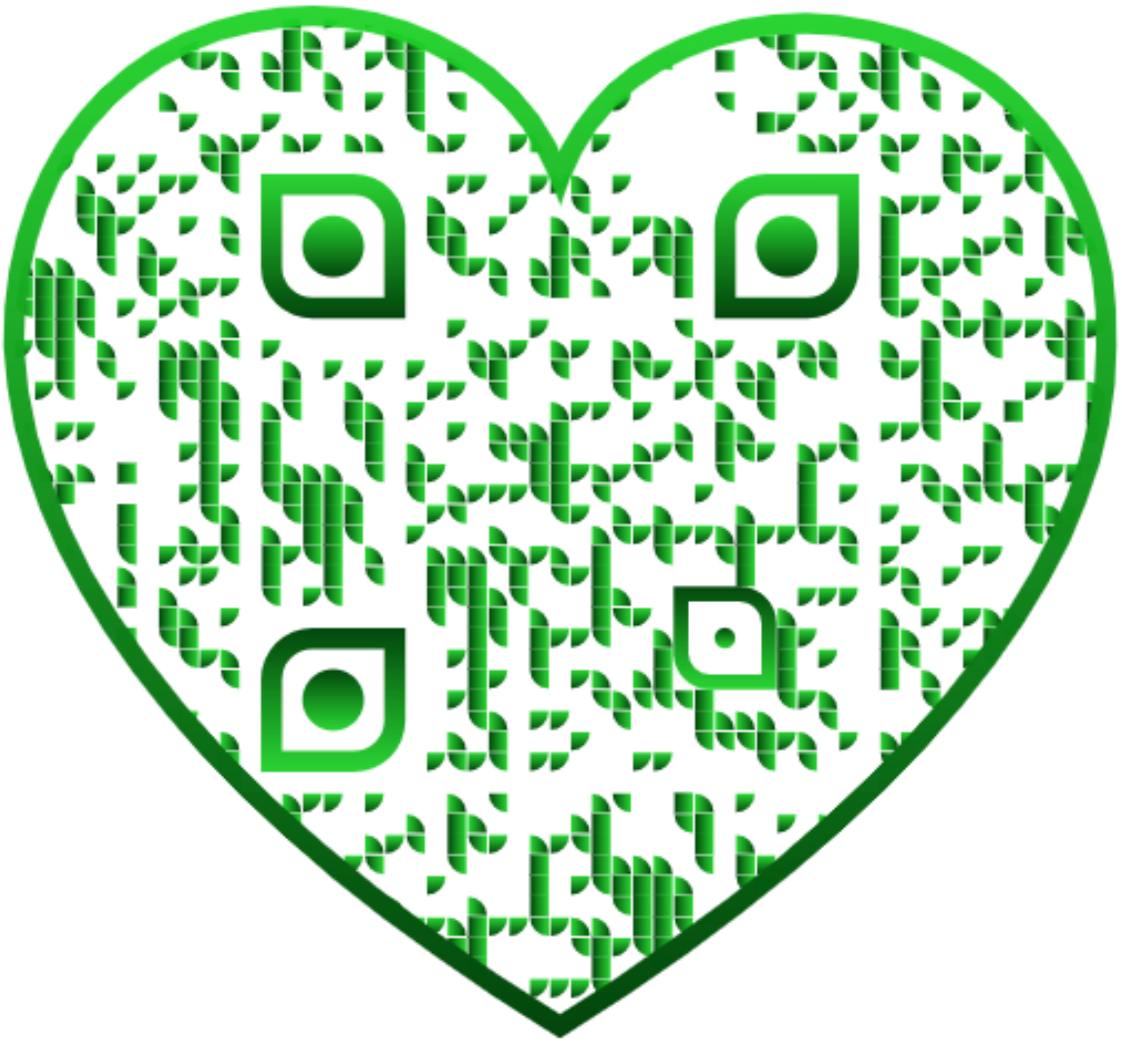
AVII '75 Tele Deluxe & '72 Tele Thinline on review

KIRK HAMMETT

METALLICA'S LEAD GUITAR GOD ON THE BLACK MAGIC OF 'GREENY'

PLUS A TRIBUTE TO SISTER ROSETTA THARPE GRAHAM NASH RIVAL SONS

FUTURE



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Wizards & Wands

Are famous guitars imbued with some of the spirit of the people who played them? Perhaps that's too much like magical thinking for some, but certainly there's a relationship between the player and these old planks of wood we love that involves a kind of alchemy. No guitar typifies that better than 'Greeny', the '59 Les Paul that, successively, Peter Green, Gary Moore and now Metallica's Kirk Hammett (see page 56) have made music with. The people who built that guitar at Gibson would have been astonished if you'd told them three of the biggest guitar heroes of all time would all find inspiration in the very same Kalamazoo-built electric over the course of six decades. So is there truly something about Greeny that is a bit magic? The answer is, there probably is something a bit special about it, something resonant, sonorous and timeless that guitarists find it easy to connect with. But the rest has to do with how every guitarist looks up to a player who came before them. Gary Moore admired Peter Green and, later, Kirk Hammett admired both players in his turn.

Buying *the* actual guitar or guitars used by your heroes is, of course, the ultimate expression of that desire to emulate – and the upcoming auction of Peter Green's guitars (page 66) shows that needn't necessarily be beyond the financial reach of ordinary players. But the value of serial production replicas, such as the new Gibson USA Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' Les Paul Standard model (page 62) is harder to quantify. They'll make a lot of the people who buy them feel closer to the players they love, but it's harder to make the case that they will inspire new music. Still, if the sounds and vibe are compelling, it's not a completely outlandish idea.

But the most practical reason to buy signature guitars is they tend to have spec details that you can't find on stock models, be it a reverse-polarity pickup or a one-off finish. So, ironically, copies of other people's guitars have ended up being a way to buy something different and distinctive in a cautious, homogenous market. Enjoy the issue and see you next time.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

Tyler Bryant
The Texan rocker has some wise and hard-earned advice on buying guitars to pass on, plus some nice tone insights on **p110**

Sister Act
One of the prime pioneers of blues and early rock 'n' roll, Sister Rosetta Tharpe deserves more credit for her contribution to music **p76**

Jason Lollar
He's the man behind some of the most widely admired aftermarket pickups you can buy and he shares his tone secrets with us on **p102**

COVER: KIRK HAMMETT IMAGE BY ROSS HALFIN; TYLER BRYANT PHOTO BY RYAN PIORKOWSKI; SISTER ROSETTA THARPE PHOTO BY JAMES KRIEGSMANN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; JASON LOLLAR PHOTO BY RICK DAHMS COURTESY OF LOLLAR PICKUPS

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Contents

ISSUE 499 JULY 2023

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Ross Halfin

COVER FEATURE

Kirk Hammett

56 As Gibson brings the essence of Peter Green's hallowed 'Greeny' Les Paul that bit closer to the masses with the release of its USA Kirk Hammett core model, the Fleetwood Mac guitarist's personal collection of instruments goes under the hammer at Bonhams in London. Join us as we hear Kirk's take on his new guitar – and examine some of the gems that are up for auction

REGULARS

028.....Gas Supply
032.....Fretbuzz
034.....New Music
036.....Tones Behind The Tracks
038.....Opinion
044.....Substitute
046.....Feedback
096.....Subscribe
110.....Bought & Sold
112.....The Mod Squad
116.....Nitty Gritty
120.....Talking Loud
122.....Classic Gear
124.....Vintage Icons
130.....Next Month

FEATURES

050.....Rival Sons
056.....Kirk Hammett
066.....The Peter Green Collection Auction
076.....Pioneers: Sister Rosetta Tharpe
102.....Blueprint: Lollar Pickups

NEW GEAR

008.....**Fender** American Vintage II 1972 Telecaster Thinline & 1975 Telecaster Deluxe
014.....**JWJ Guitars** Parlour & Orchestra
020.....**Epiphone** Jim James ES-335
022.....**J Rockett** Archer Select
024.....**Walrus Audio** Fable Granular Soundscape Generator
026.....**Fidelity** EERA Baritone
062.....**Gibson** Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' Les Paul Standard
080.....**Atkin** Mindhorn Deluxe & The Boosh OS
090.....**Bad Cat** Black Cat
098.....**DOD** Compressor 280, Envelope Filter 440, Gonkulator Ring Modulator & Overdrive Preamp 250

TECHNIQUES

126.....Blues Headlines with Richard Barrett

VIDEO & AUDIO

To enjoy all of the video and audio content in this issue, type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions in the post entitled 'Guitarist video and audio': **http://bit.ly/guitaristextra**

music radar. SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

FENDER AMERICAN VINTAGE II 1972 TELECASTER THINLINE
£2,259
WHAT IS IT? Remake of the guitar that took Fender's workhorse model in a wholly new direction and favourite of Coldplay's Jonny Buckland

FENDER AMERICAN VINTAGE II 1975 TELECASTER DELUXE
£2,179
WHAT IS IT? Reissue of the final humbucking Tele, circa 1973, that was available for a short time with a vibrato, too; this one is based on the more common hardtail version

Recasters!

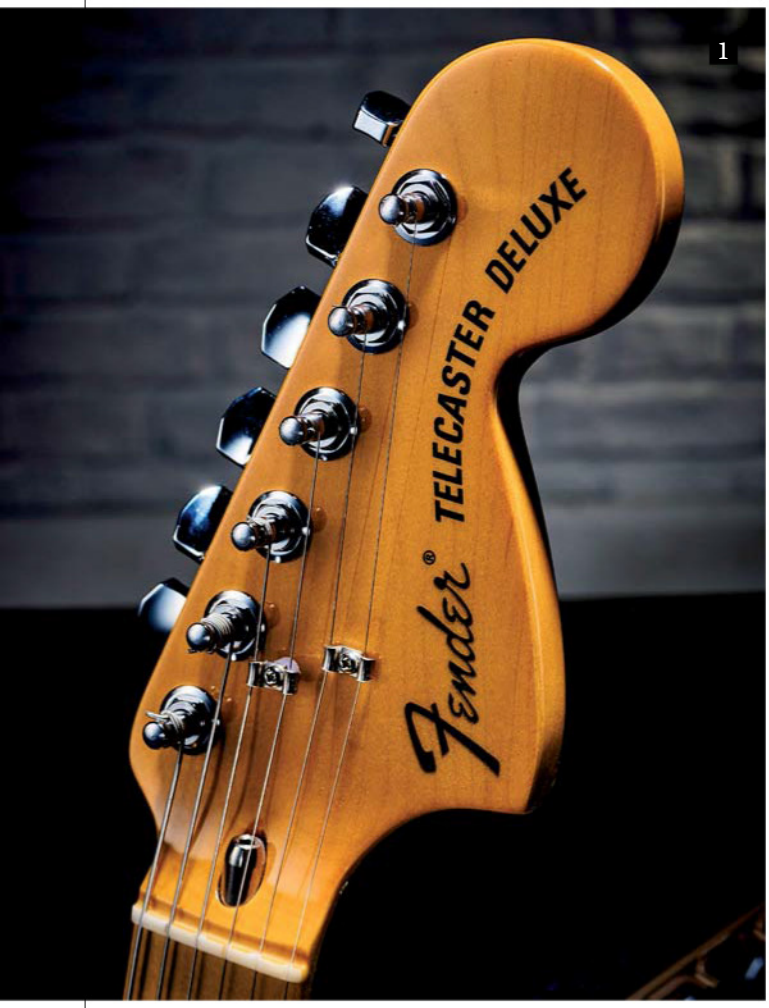
Time has mellowed the wrath of the detractors and reinforced the joy of the believers in a range that divided opinion when first released in the early 70s

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Olly Curtis

By the early 1970s, the Telecaster had already been around for more than 20 years. Five decades on and this seems like nothing at all. But back then it made Fender, still under relatively new management, feel that a change of direction was needed in order to refresh the range and perhaps chime better with the tougher music scene that was emerging. The company was experiencing a dip in popularity, since everyone from The Stones' Keith Richards to Wishbone Ash, Aerosmith, Mick Ronson with Bowie, Phil Manzanera with Roxy Music, Adrian Fisher with Sparks, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Martin Barre with Jethro Tull and, of course, a still massive Led Zeppelin were all mainly toting Gibsons. So perhaps those once all-conquering single coils had become the problem?

Enter the Thinline (the second version), Custom and Deluxe Telecasters, all fitted with

INSTRUMENT



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at least one brand-new Fender humbucking pickup. Fender co-opted Seth Lover, designer of Gibson's own humbucker, to develop something that would not only suit the Fender style but produce the thicker tones that 70s rock demanded. Using a material called CuNiFe (pronounced "cu-ni-fay"), Lover came up with what Fender called the 'Wide Range' pickup. Here's a brief history from Tim Shaw, chief engineer at Fender.

"CuNiFe has been around for about 80 years," he explains. "It's an alloy of copper, nickel and iron, has been used in many different applications and, if you messed with it long enough, you could make a magnet out of it. At the time, it was the only magnet material that could be made into a screw. Since the patent for Seth's original humbucking pickup was still in force, he couldn't infringe himself, so – knowing about CuNiFe – he decided to try to make a pickup out of it. Seth learned pretty quickly that it wasn't like Alnico or other magnets, and had to allow for the fact that it didn't have much iron in it, so a pickup he wound with CuNiFe didn't have a lot of low-end. That forced him to make it bigger than the one he'd designed previously. And that's what became the Wide Range humbucking pickup."

A by-product of this larger footprint was that the pickup acted on a longer length of string, helping it to produce that thicker sound – and one that was quite distinct from Seth's original Gibson design. But more on those tones later.

The instruments we have here, from the American Vintage II series, are the 1972 Telecaster Thinline and 1975 Deluxe, which both feature dual Wide Range humbuckers. Their sibling, the Custom, a favourite of Keith Richards, of course, featured a neck humbucker but a regular Tele bridge pickup and is also available in the new range as the 1977 Telecaster Custom. Things to note are the Deluxe's large Stratocaster-style headstock and, due to the chunky bridge pickup on both guitars, hardtail bridges with through-body stringing. Interestingly, while the Deluxe comes with solid stainless saddles, the Thinline retains the vintage-style bent steel variety.

> 50 years on, it has to be said that Fender got the looks of these guitars spot on… They were right all along

Timber-wise, the Deluxe is a two-piece spread of not overly heavyweight alder, while the Thinline is hewn from nicely grained ash. Back in the day we vintage aficionados felt the natural look we see here seemed somewhat anaemic, but a few decades on – and in this lightly tinted form and with such attractive grain – it looks delightful. Three-tone sunburst, of course, remains timeless, and the Deluxe's black 'guard sets it off perfectly.

One of the changes of which vintage die-hards disapproved was the three-bolt neck attachment with 'Micro-Tilt' adjustment. While it was designed to eradicate the need for shims should your neck require a steeper angle during setups, detractors deemed the mechanism a 'tone sucker'. Add to this opinion the often-sloppy neck joints of the time (which, thankfully, are no longer a problem) and you could perhaps see their point.

1. Note the Deluxe's Strat-style headstock, twin string trees, bullet truss rod and slightly darker tint to the front (headstock fronts were finished in cellulose so went darker with age)

2. Control-wise, the Deluxe is the more Gibson-like of the two, with its full complement of double volume and tone pots, plus three-way toggle selector switch

3

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Tuners on both instruments are Schaller-style enclosed units, and while the Deluxe carries double string trees (first and second, and third and fourth strings), the Thinline has the usual lone retainer.

A major contrast comes by way of the two guitars' control setups. Whereas the Thinline has the conventional Tele single volume and tone controls plus pickup selector, the Deluxe goes for Gibson's jugular with volume and tone rotaries for each humbucker plus a Les Paul-style shoulder-mounted three-way toggle (as did the Custom). This necessitated the already large 'guard of the Thinline to be extended to accommodate it. Another difference is the fact that the Thinline retains Fender's original 184mm (7.25-inch) radius neck with vintage tall frets, whereas the Deluxe features the more modern 241mm (9.5-inch) and medium-jumbo formula.

Now, 50 years on, it has to be said that Fender got the looks of these guitars spot on. The big pickguards (especially the Thinline's white pearloid) make a strong visual statement, as do those big and bold humbuckers with their three-a-side polepieces. And a Tele with a Strat headstock? Absolutely!

3. That three-bolt Micro-Tilt neck mechanism caused a big fuss with the Fender purists, but in reality it's a very workable solution to an otherwise tricky problem

4. Schaller and Grover tuners were always seen as an upgrade to the Kluson types fitted to Fenders and Gibsons, so on these guitars we find Schaller-style heavy duty enclosed units

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Feel & Sounds

During the 70s Fender necks were often slimmer than they had previously been. And our faithfully reproduced Thinline and Deluxe Teles conform to this trend, especially down at the nut end, where the general C-section slims down to 20mm depth at the 1st fret (compared with the 21mm of our own '52 Tele Reissue, which is also more U-shaped). If you're not used to such slinkiness, it might take you by surprise, but these guitars remain supremely comfortable, aided by their perfectly set actions. The difference in feel between the two, the Deluxe with its 241mm (9.5-inch) radius fingerboard and 21 medium-jumbo frets, and the Thinline's 184mm (7.25-inch), is not as great as you might expect. Barre chords are perhaps easier on the smaller radius, while heftier bends and vibrato seem more natural on the larger of the two. But, really, the difference is marginal. The guitars clock in at a virtually identical 3.5 kg (7.75lb), but the Deluxe's belly cut means it's the more stand-up friendly of the two.

Anyone who's put a Gibson humbucker in a Strat knows it doesn't instantly transform it into a Les Paul, tonally. So many things are different: the woods, the construction, even the bridge/tailpiece style will impact on the sound. So, while of course a 'bucker on a Strat is going to sound thicker, it's thicker in a slightly different way. With this in mind, and knowing that CuNiFe sounds unlike Alnico, ceramic or other magnets, we plugged into our ever-faithful Laney Lionheart L20T.

Thinline first, and we notice a spanky clean tone that's definitely within the Fender family of sounds – a little bit Jazzmaster, perhaps? There's brightness across all pickup selections, but it's never harsh or shrill. And yet neither is it 'fat' in the Gibson sense; there's clarity even when pushed hard, across neck and bridge pickups, and with both on. Dirtying things up it refuses to get mushy, even with the Lionheart's gain whacked up high. Sure, the semi-hollow nature of the Thinline's body will be adding something to the magic here, but it's the sum of the parts and not any single facet that makes the guitar so engaging.

Our Deluxe model is definitely a more strident beast. Still not particularly Gibson-like, nonetheless it has a harder, darker edge. Clean, the two guitars are very closely matched, but cranking up the sunburst it becomes something of a monster. It wants to feed back but in a nice, controllable way, and will happily sustain should that be your thing.

Of course, with its more comprehensive control setup there's a bigger range on the Deluxe than on the Thinline, mainly when you're balancing tones and volumes between the pickups. But both

6

5. Although there's no chrome plate here, the Thinline's controls follow the usual Telecaster template of single volume and tone plus three-way selector

6. Both of our guitars feature through-body stringing. Note the coloured ball-ends of the D'Addario strings that Fender now fits

7. A great close-up of that opinion-dividing bullet truss rod adjuster, and the slotted tuner post

are superb-sounding instruments, with tones that are distinctly their own.

Verdict

Confession: this reviewer was among those who never quite got Fender's 70s reimagining of its Telecaster range. "What was wrong with it in the first place?" we reasoned. Well, actually, Fender was right all along, as has been proved with so many 'lemons' down the decades. These guitars do exactly what Fender intended, lending a new and more chunky voice to their long-established workhorse.

Just as with Gibson's ES-335 and Les Paul, the Thinline is the more subtle and perhaps refined of these two guitars; its ever-so-slightly lighter tones would make it the perfect partner for a nice set of pedals into a clean but throbbing amp. The Deluxe retains that clean 'clank' but with a bit more in the tank should you want it.

So, which of this delightful duo would we most like to take home? It's a close-run thing, but ask us today and, for its slightly more open sound and subtle edge, it's probably the Thinline. Pose the same question tomorrow, and who knows?

Back in the day we found the Thinline's natural look somewhat anaemic, but today, with such attractive grain, it looks delightful

FENDER AMERICAN VINTAGE II 1972 TELECASTER THINLINE

PRICE: £2,259 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cut, semi-hollow thinline electric
BODY: Semi-hollow ash
NECK: Maple
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Integral maple, with 184mm (7.25") radius
FRETS: 21, vintage tall
HARDWARE: Chrome plated, hardtail bridge/tailpiece with through-body stringing
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm (2.165")
ELECTRICS: 2x Fender CuNiFe Wide Range pickups, 3-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls plus
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.515/7.75
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: The third 70s Tele in the AVRII range is 1977 Telecaster Custom (£,2,079) also available in the Mexican-made Vintera range as the 70s Custom (£1,009)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Aged Natural (as reviewed), 3-Color Sunburst, Lake Placid Blue

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
01342 331700
www.fender.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Very smart vintage-informed build; attention to detail; looks and sounds the business; a proper 'pro' guitar for £2k

CONS Some might find the neck a bit skinny, or prefer a more modern fingerboard radius and larger frets

FENDER AMERICAN VINTAGE II 1975 TELECASTER DELUXE

PRICE: £2,179 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cut, solidbody electric
BODY: Alder, with belly cut
NECK: Maple
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Integral maple, with 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome plated, hardtail bridge/tailpiece with through-body stringing
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Fender CuNiFe Wide Range pickups, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.515/7.75
OPTIONS: N/A
RANGE OPTIONS: The more modern American Pro II Tele Deluxe with Tim Shaw-designed V-Mod II Double Tap humbuckers costs £1,839. The Vintera '70s Telecaster Deluxe is £979
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: 3-Color Sunburst (as reviewed), Black, Mocha

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Powerful but distinct set of tones with four-knob control; modern fingerboard radius, larger frets and sensible weight

CONS Again, very little to complain about here – a fine guitar

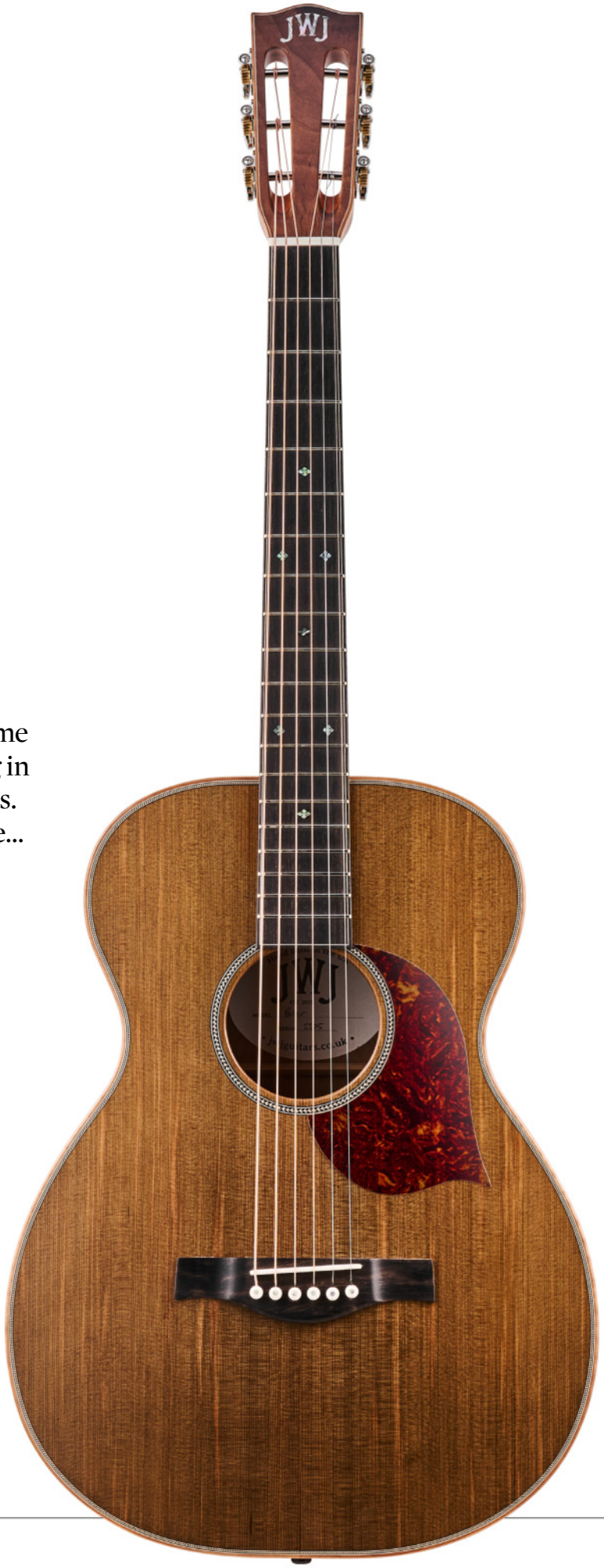
JWJ PARLOUR
£1,975
WHAT IS IT? A cedar and walnut 00-sized guitar with a surprisingly boisterous voice

JWJ ORCHESTRA
£1,875
WHAT IS IT? A high-spec OM cutaway in a suit of torrefied spruce and Indian rosewood

New Voices

JWJ Guitars is a relatively new name on the lutherie circuit, specialising in bespoke builds at off-the-peg prices. Interested? You probably should be...

Words David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker



We have to admit that we weren't aware of JWJ Guitars until a few months ago when luthier Rich Jones visited us at *Guitarist* HQ in order for us to sample his wares. Based in Shropshire, Rich began building guitars as a hobbyist 20 years ago, turning fully professional around 2018. With guitars a passion since his youth, Rich had found that his early builds were attracting a lot of attention on his local music scene with players queuing up for new instruments. Eventually, the decision was made to make guitar building his full-time occupation. "I was running a restaurant," he tells us. "I'd always run pubs and restaurants and it was just hard work, doing all those hours and never being at home. So it just kind of made sense to do this and be around more, you know?"

Essentially a one-man operation, Rich now builds a range of acoustics (see our spec lists

JWJ
JWJ

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1. For maker Rich Jones, the unconventional 13th-fret neck join on the Parlour was the sweet spot, as it places the bridge on a wider section of the guitar's top for extra resonance

2. String saddles and nuts on both these JWJ models are bone

3. Exceptional attention has been paid to the details on both guitars, as is evidenced here by the neat and tidy binding

and the company website for model info) and will happily take on the individual design requirements of his customers. Both the models we have before us now are recent builds and two contrasting guitars: the ever popular OM-size cutaway, plus a Parlour/00 – both of which are finished in a thin matt coating of nitrocellulose. Our first glance suggests a very high level of workmanship on both instruments and Rich tells us that both have been built using only hand tools and workbench hours. We're quite excited to pick them up and start hearing their voices, but first a quick run-through of the duo's parts and specs.

Looking first at the Parlour model, despite its name it measures up more as an 00, as it lacks that petite 'figure of eight' shape to the body. Here, the lower bout is slightly more full and rounded. The top is what Rich has described as "aged cedar" whereby the wood is vacuum dried before the ageing process is begun using ammonia gas, which reacts with the tannins in the wood to produce the distinctive 'antiqued' appearance we see here. It certainly has a much darker look to it than cedar's usual ruddy hue.

Back and sides are from a nicely bookmatched and very attractive figured walnut that bounces around in the light as the guitar shifts position (a phenomenon

3

known to luthiers as chatoyance). The neck is Honduran mahogany – another premium wood – topped with an African mahogany fretboard, and the same wood is used in the guitar's bridge. Both the nut and saddle are from bone, and the slotted headstock and Kluson tuners complete the package.

You might have noticed that the Parlour's neck joins the body at the 13th fret instead of the more customary 12th or 14th. Naturally, we were curious as to the thought process behind this: "A lot of builders say that a 12th-fret join sounds best, don't they?" says Rich. "So it was a kind of a compromise really because whenever I played 12-fret [to the body] guitars – and I don't play at the top a great deal – even I kind of miss that accessibility. Whereas the 13th-fret joint, I feel like I can still play most of the things that I want to play fairly easily. And you move the bridge just a little bit further towards the widest part of the top. I wanted to make sure that I still had that bottom-end and volume."

All fair enough, of course, and it made us think why the 12th and 14th neck joint has become so firmly traditional in the acoustic world. Martin's SC-13E acoustic also has a 13th-fret neck joint and so maybe it's time to re-evaluate things? In any case, it all comes down to tone and we'll be auditioning the Parlour shortly. But first we'll turn our attention to the OM.

Once again, just turning the guitar over in our hands it's easy to see the quality of the workmanship that has gone into this build. Binding, bookmatching, fretwork and finishing are all top-notch. The soundboard is torrefied Sitka spruce with the back and sides made from Indian rosewood. The neck is Honduran mahogany with an Indian rosewood 'board, headstock faceplate and bridge. Once again, both the nut and saddle are bone and a set of Kluson open-back 18:1 ratio tuners completes the body furniture.

Feel & Sounds

One thing that both guitars have in common is that they are really light. It's the first thing you notice when you pick them up. "I like to make them as resonant as possible," Rich tells us. "The lightness is something that a lot of people comment on when they pick them up and I think the lighter build helps the resonance, really. If I pick up an electric now it just feels like an anvil!"

Our first glance suggests a very high level of workmanship on both instruments

Returning to the Parlour, we're surprised by how loud it is and it's certainly not lacking in the bass end. Many small-bodied acoustics tend to suffer from boxiness, but there isn't a trace of that present here. It's likely that the combination of the lighter build and the 13th-fret neck joint having moved the bridge in a little more has made a considerable amount of difference. And, as far as orientation is concerned, the neck joint wasn't a problem for us at any point while we were putting the parlour through its paces.

In both instances we have to factor in that these guitars are workbench-fresh and it will be a while before the woods settle in and the tops open out. But what we've heard so far certainly bodes well for the future. If we're were going to be really picky, we would say that there is a little bit of midrange mud around the E on the Parlour's D string, but it's very slight and could easily be put down to the settling in process that we've just noted.

The OM is everything you'd expect from this most popular body size. Basses, mids and trebles are all nicely balanced and there's a good set of dynamics present, too. Played lightly, it whispers – and just

4. Open-back Kluson tuners sit atop the Honduran mahogany neck on the OM

stops short of a full-blooded roar when strummed or picked hard. After all, if 'roar' is your thing, you'd probably be looking at a dreadnought anyway.

The neck is a full C shape – quite chunky and pleasantly so to boot – and playability is great across the fingerboard, with the finely crafted cutaway offering access to the uppermost frets.

Verdict

We like both of these guitars a lot. Each has its own particular charm. The Parlour is slight in body and big in voice, it looks great, the build quality is very good and that aged cedar top sets the guitar off well. The OM is more the all-rounder with plenty of volume and a good dynamic range. In terms of price, when you consider that both of these instruments are hand-crafted, nitro-finished with premium body woods and weigh in at under £2k, they really are competitive in today's acoustic marketplace and well worth checking out. We would definitely conclude that JWJ Guitars is a name to watch.

> "The lightness is something that a lot of people comment on and I think the lighter build helps the resonance" ***Rich Jones***

JWJ GUITARS PARLOUR

PRICE: £1,975 (inc Hiscox case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: 00-size acoustic
TOP: Aged cedar
BACK/SIDES: Figured European walnut
MAX RIM DEPTH: 105mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 363mm
NECK: Honduras mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Kluson open-back 18:1 ratio
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: African ebony
FRETS: 19
BRIDGE/SPACING: Bone/57mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.59/3.52
OPTIONS: LR Baggs Lyric or James May Ultra Tonic pickups installed – both £300
RANGE OPTIONS: Custom builds available from £1,999. Parlour, Orchestra, Dreadnought and Slope Shoulder models, C, D, V or A neck profiles, a range of tonewoods and aesthetic options available
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge
FINISH: Satin nitrocellulose

JWJ Guitars
07968 590718
https://jwjguitars.co.uk

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Very good build; hand-built quality; great set of tones; very competitive price

CONS That 13th-fret neck joint might deter purists

JWJ GUITARS ORCHESTRA

PRICE: £1,875 (inc Hiscox case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: OM-size acoustic
TOP: Torrefied Sitka Spruce
BACK/SIDES: Indian Rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 110mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 382mm
NECK: Honduras mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 644mm (25.4")
TUNERS: Kluson open back 18:1 ratio
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Bone/57mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.6/3.6
OPTIONS: LR Baggs Lyric or James May Ultra Tonic pickups installed both £300
RANGE OPTIONS: As left, prices from £1,999, cutaway is a £125 upcharge
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge
FINISH: Satin Nitrocellulose

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS A great all-rounder with a superb build, quality woods and a competitive price

CONS Very little to report

Fender

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EPIPHONE
JIM JAMES ES-335
£899

WHAT IS IT? More affordable Epiphone version of Gibson's Jim James signature with Alnico Classic Pro 'buckers and subtle owl themes

Night Flight

Another example of 70s chic, this walnut-coloured Epiphone aims to clone the Gibson version for considerably less cash

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

1. Compared with the Gibson version, this Epiphone has a darker and more opaque, almost black, walnut gloss finish. It retains the 70s style, though, with the short pickguard

2. Epiphone's LockTone tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece use small leaf springs to hold the parts onto their posts. "This system not only 'locks' onto the posts automatically and eliminates accidental drops, it also adds 'tone' and sustain," says Epiphone

3. Unlike the Gibson T-Types used on the USA model, here we have Epiphone's more standard Alnico Pro Classics, which use Alnico magnets with symmetrical coil winds. Our DCRs measured 7.9kohms at the bridge and 7.6k at the neck

4. Many of the upgrades on recent Epiphones include CTS 500k pots and large Orange Drop tone caps, as here. The silver-topped 'witch hat' knobs also add to the 70s vibe, although they actually graced the ES-335 from around 1966

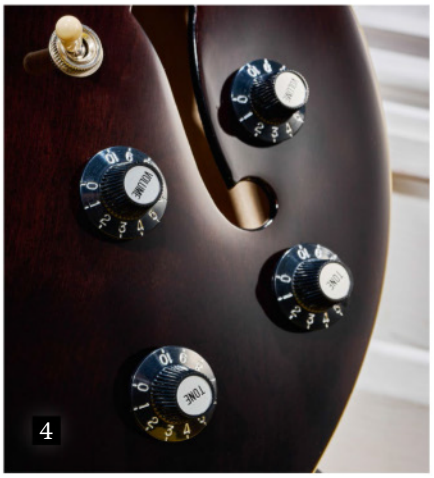
Just over a year ago, back in issue 482, we looked at Jim James's signature Gibson ES-335. With its calibrated T-Type pickups and light weight, it proved to be one of the most playable and vibrant-sounding 335s we'd encountered for a while. The signature guitar for My Morning Jacket's frontman came across as a real journeyman ES thinline, a guitar that sits comfortably in pretty much any musical genre. And if this new Epiphone version comes anywhere near close, it's game on.

Lifting it out of its large, owl logo'd hard case it's an encouraging start. Like the Gibson it's inspired by, which weighed a trim 3.55kg (7.81lb), our Epi JJ tips the scales at a very close and still light-for-the-style 3.62kg (7.96lb). Of course, it's a nitro-free zone here, but the dark brown, almost black gloss poly finish is typically well done. The body is all laminate (or 'layered' as Epiphone prefers) maple, with a maple centre block, and internally it's very clean with tidy kerfed linings and neatly painted edges to the classic f-holes.

The neck is pretty close to the USA model, too, and virtually identical in width: 43.5mm at the nut, 53.6mm at the 12th fret. It's very slightly thinner in depth, measuring 20mm at the 1st fret and 22.7mm by the 12th, with that typical SlimTaper profile – which can polarise opinion but is very successfully used on numerous mainstream Gibsons, such as the Standard '60s and Classic Les Pauls. Rosewood is switched to laurel for the fingerboard, which does look a little pale and dry, but the fretting is very good from a medium-gauge wire, just like the recent Epiphone Joe Bonamassa '62 ES-335 we looked at. It really plays well, tuning stability is very good and unplugged it's lively, responsive and quite loud, like a noisy youngster.

Plugged in, though, it sounds considerably more mature and is quite the all-rounder, equally at home for your retro jazz-funk as it is with pretty gainy alt-rock and beyond, not to mention janglier styles, old and new. There's a crisp attack at the bridge with a slightly relaxed midrange and good clarity at the neck, although the volume pot tapers are quite quick, which won't suit everyone, and the modern wiring means we lose a little high-end as they're rolled back. It's a little generic sounding, perhaps with less character than you might hear with Gibson Burstbuckers, but if we're honest that probably adds to its broad stylistic appeal, which is always a part of the ES-335 proposition and very evident here. G

3



4

EPIPHONE JIM JAMES ES-335

PRICE: £899 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway, semi-solid thinline electric
BODY: Laminated maple (5-ply) with f-holes and solid maple centre block
NECK: Mahogany, Jim James Custom Profile Slim Taper C, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian laurel, dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium/jumbo
HARDWARE: Epiphone LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, Kluson Waffleback – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Epiphone Alnico Classic Pro covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, individual volume and tone controls for each pickup
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.62/7.96
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: Current Artist thinlines include the BB King Lucille (£969) and the Joe Bonamassa '62 (£1,149). The standard ES-335 (£599) comes in 2 colours but without a hard case
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Walnut (as reviewed)

Epiphone
www.epiphone.com

8/10

PROS Very tidy build; good weight; versatile voices; workingman vibe

CONS Although it includes a hard case and the artist association, it's quite an upcharge from the standard Epi ES-335

J ROCKETT ARCHER SELECT
£349

WHAT IS IT? A Klon klone with clipping diode variations, including five NOS germanium types

Diode Diversity

Not sure what diodes sound best in a Klon-style pedal? J Rockett's latest has you covered with its seven options

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. You use the Clipping selector knob to select from the six alternative clipping diodes. They're arranged clockwise from the lowest volume output (germanium 1N270) to highest volume output (red LEDs)
2. The Clipping footswitch switches between the pedal's default diodes and the alternative diodes selected with the selector switch, so you always have two options available
3. This extra socket is a DI output and provides a direct output with speaker simulation based on a British 4x12 cabinet for monitoring or recording. The toggle switch lifts the ground for this output

Ah, the Klon Centaur, that mythical pedal that's likely to set you back silly money for an original. We recently saw one for sale in the UK at an asking price of £6,800! Of course, you don't have to pay that amount of money to get the Klon experience because there are a number of 'klones' on the market, seemingly built around the same circuitry... But do those units have the 'magic' diodes found in the original?

While Klon mainman Bill Finnegan maintains that his stock of particular 1N34A germanium diodes are essential to the true Klon sound, there are arguably other aspects of the circuitry that are more important to the end result than the type of diodes used, especially as the clipping diodes only exert any influence at higher settings of the gain knob. Nevertheless, for anyone who is overly concerned about the diodes, we now have the J Rockett Archer Select, which gives you a choice of seven types. This latest in the Archer series is built around a default set of OA10 diodes, but a second footswitch allows you to switch to a second set chosen from a six-way rotary switch, for comparison purposes or to have two sound variations available on stage.

First off, this Archer is as good as any klone gets whether you use it – as many do – with little or no gain knob as a transparent boost and amp driver, or you whack the gain up to dial in more drive. It's in the latter role that the different diodes exert their influence; we only started noticing a difference beyond midday on the gain knob.

There are five NOS germanium diode sets arranged in order of increasing output and a set of red LEDs that's loudest of all and maybe a good bet if you want a switchable onstage contrast. Any differences are really subtle, though, with the sound remaining reliably consistent throughout. However, while any of the diodes could do the job the pedal is designed for, this reviewer was drawn to how one particular option felt to play through, which may be the point. The nuances of tone and compression are there to be exploited and players can find a favourite to optimise their K-style experience.

Verdict

Sounding excellent and aiming to sidestep the 'magic diode' debate by giving you choices, the Archer Select may just be the ultimate Klon klone.

J ROCKETT
ARCHER SELECT

PRICE: £349
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Boost/drive pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass, 7x clipping options (OA10, 1N270, 1N695, 1N34A, D9B, D9E, Red LEDs), DI output
CONTROLS: Output, Treble, Gain, Clipping selector, DI Groundlift switch, Bypass footswitch, Clipping footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard DI output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) <100mA
DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 110 (d) x 45mm (h)

FACE bvba
+32 3 844 67 97
www.rockettpedals.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Solid build quality; compact size; sound quality; variety of clipping options

CONS A premium for differences between clipping modes that are subtle, to say the least; no switchable buffered/true bypass

THE RIVALS

While J Rockett has several examples of the genre, you'll find Klon klones and similarly styled pedals from many manufacturers. The Wampler Tumnus Deluxe (£199) expands the feature set with three-band EQ, a Normal/Hot switch and selectable true or buffered bypass. For a bit less outlay check out Electro-Harmonix's Soul Food (£85). Besides straight Klon-type pedals, if you want more versatility in a single pedal there are some twin-footswitch options: Ceriatone's Horse Breaker (£199) combines a klone with the company's take on a Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal, while the Crazy Tube Circuits Unobtanium (£249) pairs a klone with the signature sounds of a couple of Dumble amp models.

Electro-Harmonix's answer to the Klon Centaur is an affordable alternative

WALRUS AUDIO FABLE
£305

WHAT IS IT? A so-called 'soundscape generator' pedal based on a sample-and-chop technique

Shape Shifter

Tell your own sonic story by sampling and chopping your sound and manipulating the fragments into shifting soundscapes

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. The X knob controls the grain size (chopped sample length) of the granular effects. Turn it left for long, smooth sampling, or turn it right for short, choppy grains. On Program 5 it also affects the rate at which the pitch shift changes in the granular process

2. The Tap footswitch offers the usual tap tempo but can be held for the Dive/Rise effect, momentarily shifting the clock rate of the pedal down or up and keeping it at that rate as long as the switch is held. Bypass and Tap simultaneously held will change the direction, indicated by different coloured LEDs

3. The Mod knob controls the amount of modulation added to the wet signal. When Bypass is held down you can also use it to adjust the modulation rate (the bypass LED flashes at the modulation rate during this action)

It's only a few months since the release of the Lore Reverse Soundscape Generator, but Walrus Audio is back with another ambience pedal that shares exactly the same format with an identical set of controls. This time, however, what you're getting is a 'Granular Soundscape Generator' based on the digital processing technique of micro-sampling, where short samples called grains are read from a delay buffer and can then be manipulated in a number of ways to achieve a range of effects.

Utilising two onboard DSP chips, the signal runs through two separate effects in series, the Feedback and Regen knobs providing feedback paths for each, and there are five different selectable granular delay programs.

Program 1 offers Reverse Delay into a Reverse Granular algorithm that plays grains backwards. Basically, before engaging either feedback path, you get a load of glitchy repeats, their timing set with the Time knob or tap tempo. These can be completely transformed from woolly to glassy via the Tone knob, which incorporates both low- and high-pass filtering. Advancing the Feedback and Regen knobs lengthens and extends the trail, so you get a whole long-lingering murmuration of shifting and pulsating ambience going on. To this you can also add modulation (with adjustable rate and depth) for an even more complex stew.

This mode alone has so much variation on the theme to get engrossed in – including the X knob for adjusting grain size – that it may be some time before you try the other four: Forward Delay into Octave Up Granular; Analog Delay into Octave Down Granular; Multi-Tap Granular into Multi-Tap Granular (Grain-Verb); and Forward Delay into Randomized Pitch Granular. All of those, though, are sufficiently different to warrant their inclusion in the pedal and are ripe for sonic exploration with a heady cascading mix of delay, pitch shift, modulation and glitchiness.

Verdict

If you're looking for quirky and ethereal qualities, you'll find them right here. This is certainly a pedal that can create otherworldly soundscapes, but they don't have to be completely outlandish because you have a Mix knob to dial things back. While you could run the effect fully wet and make your guitar sound like a signal warbling in from deep space, there's plenty of musical scope in setting a blend that piques interest by layering your dry guitar with a somewhat different ambient colour or texture. G

WALRUS AUDIO FABLE GRANULAR SOUNDSCAPE GENERATOR

PRICE: £305
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Ambience pedal
FEATURES: Buffered Bypass, switchable Trails mode, tap tempo
CONTROLS: Feedback, Regen, Mod, Mix, X, Time, Tone, Program selector, Bypass footswitch, Tap footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 92 (w) x 121 (d) x 57mm (h)

FACE bvba
+32 3 844 67 97
www.walrusaudio.com

8/10

PROS Wide variety of textural soundscapes; very effective Tone knob; tap tempo; Dive/Rise performance feature

CONS Mono only; no preset storage; no expression pedal facility available

THE RIVALS

The Red Panda Particle V2 (£319) is a granular delay/pitch shifting pedal that chops your signal into small grains and then rearranges, shifts and mangles it, using the techniques of granular synthesis in real-time. The new Chase Bliss Audio Mood MKII ($399) has two channels that work together, one half sampling and looping brief moments, the other being a suite of real-time spatial effects. The company says that you can spill audio back and forth between the two channels for endless shaping. Among its many other options, the Empress Effects Echosystem (£439) dual-engine multi-delay has granular functions onboard.

The two engines in Empress Effects' Echosystem let you craft your own unique delay combinations

theWishlist

Dream gear to beg, borrow and steal for...

Fidelity EERA Baritone £2,649

CONTACT **Fidelity Guitars** WEB **www.fidelity-guitars.co.uk** WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Phil Barker**

It's been a while since we caught up with Cambridge-based Matt Oram and his Fidelity guitars. From his original Double Standard and JB models that we looked at back in 2018, he's been busy – creating what is now his best-selling model, the Stellarosa, and introducing his entry-level Lite models that start at just £1,650, which we'll be featuring later in the year.

The guitar you see here is actually a 711mm (28-inch) scale baritone, a signature model for Norwegian singer-songwriter and guitarist Anna Lena Bruland, aka EERA. She dropped onto Matt's radar "when she collaborated with Public Service Broadcasting, one of the other bands I work with", he tells us. "She put out a great album called *Speak* at the end of 2021 and is due to release a new record later this year."

Matt's designs seem to come from another age. In fact, the Stellarosa shape here was actually designed from a request from Marc Ransley at Mojo Pickups. "He wanted a guitar based on the Stella Japonica, a pretty rare pawn-shop prize from the 60s," says Matt. It looks like it could have been made back then and carefully looked after, too, as the Shell Pink gloss nitro is only lightly aged: "I haven't gone with any crazing, I've just left it pretty clean. I always try to add a little bit of dinging – it makes the guitars seem less precious. You don't want to be living in fear of your instrument."

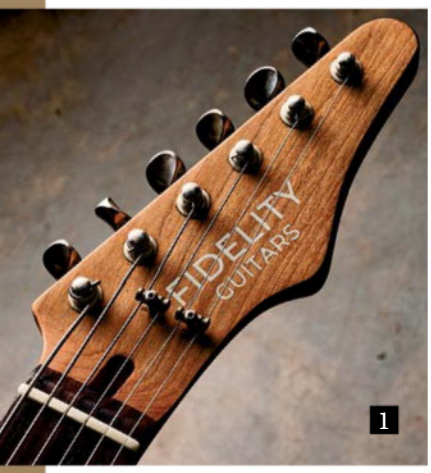
It's a good weight at 3.48kg (7.66lb): "I've moved away from swamp ash now, partly because of its decline but also environmental factors and it's really not easy to get hold of now. David Dyke [of Fretted Instruments & Luthiers Supplies], down in Sussex, has started roasting his own woods there. This roasted English ash is definitely lighter. I think it sounds better, too, and from a maker's perspective it machines a lot more cleanly."

The roasted maple for the neck is also sourced in the UK and finished with an oil. "[I use] Rubio Monocoat, which needs just one coat," says Matt. "You mix it with a hardener, it goes off overnight and you then just cut it back. It's good stuff!" As with his earlier designs, he started using wenge for the fingerboard when rosewood was restricted – and stuck with it.

While the build is very tidy with a very played-in feel, there's nothing that prepares you for its sound. Tuned B to B (with Stringjoy 0.013.5 to 0.062-gauge strings), it's a monster with immense piano-like depth and clarity from the neck pickup, a little more focus and bite at the bridge, while the series override link from the upper toggle switch launches you to the moon. Hang on! G

1. The six-in-a-line headstock has just enough room for the logo and staggered-height rear-locking Gotoh tuners. Despite the heavy strings, tuning stability is rock solid, also thanks to the finely cut bone nut

2. "The Stella Japonica had massive pickup casings shaped like these," says Matt Oram. "Marc [Ransley, Mojo Pickups] and I decided we'd make a P-90-sized steel surround in a similar shape so you can drop whatever you like into those steel frames"

3. "I've had the bridge since day one, but I now use Gotoh SW-3 saddles so you can adjust the angle and lock them; I modify them slightly by rounding their ends. The base is billet aluminium and is made in a CNC 'shop in Ely that mainly does F1 car parts"

4. "The pickups are by Marc Ransley at Mojo; the Charlie Christian but in a P-90 size at the neck is my personal favourite," says Matt. "It has a super-low resistance around 2.8kohms, but because of the way it's constructed it's stupidly loud, dynamic and articulate! The bridge is a PAF-style, again P-90 sized, with dual slot-head polepieces. That was Anna's specification: she uses mainly a Tele with a humbucker at the bridge, and a Gretsch baritone"

5. Mounted on polished dark tortoiseshell celluloid that Matt sources from China, the pair of toggle switches are both military-grade types from NKK Switches. "The treble side switch voices bridge, both and neck – actually reversed so the bridge points forward," Matt explains. "On the bass side is a two-way switch that overrides the other three-way switch and links both pickups in series, not parallel, creating one big pickup"

6. "The tailpiece is inspired by Chris Swope over at Descendant," says Matt. "I've been licensing his vibratos for three or four years now, but I use my own top plate. Under this vase-shaped plate, there's a large brass block that's slotted with holes for the ball-ends of the strings to anchor and it increases the back angle of the strings behind the bridge"

Gas Supply

Our pick of the month's most delectable and wallet-bothering new gear

NAMM 2023 Report

Gear brands traditionally flock to Anaheim for the AGM Of Tone in January, but this year, with the show itself pushed back until April and some big players choosing not to exhibit, there was a risk of this being a quieter year in terms of releases. Fear not, there are still rafts of new stuff to unbalance our current accounts. Following last issue's preview, we're now delving deeper to bring you even more highlights of GAS-inducing gear. **[SW]**

EASTMAN JULIET LA CELESTINE BLUE **£1,659**
The latest solidbody from Eastman certainly caught our attention. The Juliet LA in Celestine Blue picks up where the previous P-90-VR and PB models left off. This time, the one-piece offset okoume body and neck get a Pelham-ish blue lick of Truetone Gloss, but it doesn't end there. The pickups are a pair of Seymour Duncan Phat Cats, complete with gold foil radiator covers and controlled by a Schaller Megaswitch. Adding to its retro charm, there's a Göldo vibrato and three-point 'moving' bridge, and at the other end is a set of Göldo K-line six-in-line tuners.
www.eastmanguitars.com

GUILD SURFLINER DELUXE **£699**
When Guild unveiled its Surfliner last year, it had us hanging 10. That is, perhaps with the exception of the individual pickup toggle switches and no vibrato option. Well, now the company has beefed things up with the Surfliner Deluxe, which remedies these niggles and beyond. First up, the neck is now made of roasted maple, complete with a bound rosewood fingerboard and block inlays. The fiddly toggles are replaced with a more conventional five-way blade switch, and we can now add some vintage warbles courtesy of the Guild Floating Vibrato. They'll be riding waves towards these shores by the time you read this.
www.guildguitars.com

RAPIER 44 **£499**
Rapier Guitars unveiled its latest addition to the solidbody line-up with the Rapier 44. Joining the existing 22 and 33 models, the 44 has more gills than Jaws with no fewer than four Entwistle EWR64 mini-humbuckers (designed by Alan Entwistle). A three-way switch, two mini-toggles, a pair of volume controls and a master tone mean that the 44 model has no less than 15 switching permutations. Elsewhere, there's an okoume body, Canadian maple neck, a Hi Lo vibrato and roller bridge, and Wilkinson EZ-Lok tuners. It currently comes in any colour you like, as long as it's Fiesta Red.
www.jhs.co.uk

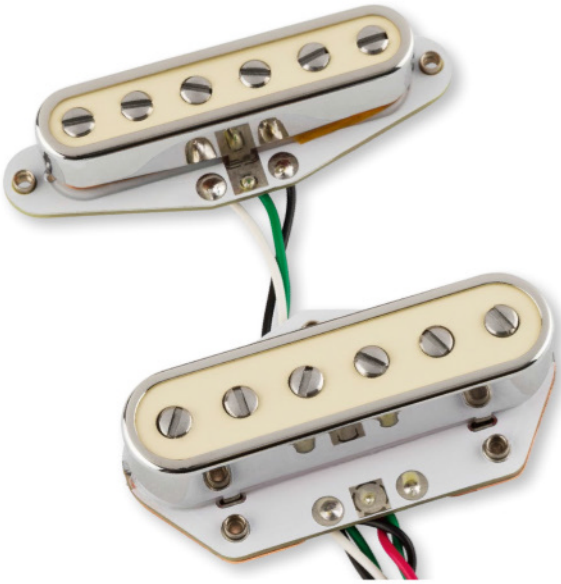
STERLING BY MUSIC MAN ST. VINCENT GOLDIE **£1,129**, CUTLASS CT50 PLUS **£879** & MARIPOSA **£809**
Sterling by Music Man lifted the lid on a number of models for NAMM, including an all-new affordable version of the St Vincent Goldie (pictured), previously only available as a full-fat Music Man model. It's equipped with a trio of Firebird-inspired gold foil mini-humbuckers, with a roasted maple neck and rosewood fingerboard and a choice of Velveteen or Cashmere finishes. Meanwhile, the already feature-packed workhorse Cutlass CT50 gets a set of newly voiced HSS pickups complete with a push-push mid-boost switch and pearloid block inlays, and Omar Rodriguez-López's Mariposa model now comes in a striking Daphne Blue finish.
www.sterlingbymusicman.com

VINTAGE GUITARS JOE DOE GAS JOCKEY **£799**
Are you spotting the trend? Triple-pickup retro guitars might well be big for 2023. Vintage Guitars' Joe Doe 2023 Collection is getting in front of it with the Gas Jockey, a double-cut made of mahogany (body), maple (neck) and a whole lotta bling (throughout), pictured here in Sparkling Gold Sand and also available in Gas Pump Red. The pickups are Wilkinson WOCMHBs and Trevor's brand has supplied the tune-o-matic and WJ55 tuners, too. It's limited to 100 pieces so you'll need to act fast.

While the brand was at it, Vintage also teased its new Revo series (Retro Vintage Originals). No details yet beyond esteemed UK builder Alan Entwistle being involved, but we'll know more soon!
www.vintageguitarsus.com

BARE KNUCKLE TRIPTYCH SINGLE COIL STRAT PICKUPS
£106 (per pickup) & £306 (set)
A trio of single coils? That's just more vintage blues power, isn't it? Well, no, because the Bare Knuckle Triptych is the signature Strat set for tone-truffling UK shredmeister Rabea Massaad. While he might have referenced some blues tones, they fall on the raunchier side, taking influence from SRV, John Mayer and Philip Sayce, and these Alnico III (bridge) and Alnico IV (neck/middle)-powered units have been made to contain additional chunk. The Triptychs are voiced to give "phenomenal extension" in the bottom-end with "rich upper mid and highs" to add weight to single-note playing and ensure that definition is intact for complex chord voicings.
www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk

REVV DYNAMIS D25 **£1,799**
You might be familiar with Revv as a purveyor of modern high-gain tone, but the Canadian noisesmith also knows a thing or two about putting together a more classic sound. The D25 takes the circuit from Revv's D20 head and places it in a 1x12 combo format, and, yes, it also contains a Two Notes Torpedo! This lower-gain 6V6-driven amp is voiced for vintage, and Revv describes it as the "perfect pedal platform". Speaker-wise, it's loaded with a Celestion Vintage 30, but once again we have a choice of six Two Notes' DynIR speaker impulses. It's shipping now.
www.revvamplification.com



FENDER CUNIFE/COBALT CHROME PICKUP SETS
FROM £279
For the first time, Fender is releasing pickups into the wild exclusive of a guitar with the new CuNiFe Stratocaster (£319) and CuNiFe Wide Range Jazzmaster (£369) sets, and the Tim Shaw-voiced Cobalt Chrome Telecaster (£279) and CuNiFe/Cobalt Chrome Jazzmaster (£279) sets. While the CuNiFe magnet was the secret weapon in Fender's much-loved Wide Range humbucker, the Cobalt Chrome models use a FeCrCo (iron, chromium, cobalt) magnet with Polysol-coated wire for beefy Tele/Jazz tones and reduced interference.
www.fender.com

The Lineup

APOGEE JAM X **£199**
If an audio interface can be considered desirable, then Apogee's Jam X is one of the sleekest we've seen. Building on the Jam's simple format paired with Apogee's stellar PureDigital A/D converters, the Jam X adds a three-mode analogue compressor (Smooth Leveler, Purple Squeeze and Vintage Blue Stomp). The mobile guitar interface will work with Mac, Windows and iOS devices – and as well as 24-bit/96kHz recording, the simplified approach is continued by a single guitar input/mini-jack output and rugged metal design. We get zero-latency direct monitoring, a free version of Ableton (Live Lite) and an extended trial of Neural DSP's Archetype: Tim Henson plug-in.
www.apogeedigital.com

WAMPLER CORY WONG COMPRESSOR **£295**
Compression is possibly one of the most misunderstood effects, but Vulfpeck's funkster-in-chief, Cory Wong, is here to reinforce its importance with his new signature dual-footswitch Wong Compressor from Wampler. As well as crucial controls such as Attack and Sustain, plus a Blend control to maintain some dynamics, Cory's compressor also serves as a non-compressing, footswitchable boost pedal, inspired by Clapton's much-loved MDX Stratocaster boost circuit. It doesn't stop there, though, because there's also a left-hand XLR socket so that you can go direct straight into the front-of-house or a recording setup, plus you'll find a handy ground lift switch, too. Phew!
www.wamplerpedals.com

ELECTRO-HARMONIX/JHS LIZARD QUEEN **£99**
In 2022, JHS Pedals' Josh Scott featured an EHX-inspired octave-fuzz prototype on his YouTube channel, with visual designs completed by pedal nut Daniel Danger. EHX has now unveiled an Electro-Harmonix-branded production version of the Lizard Queen, a Nano-sized pedal housing Josh's circuit. The transistor-based fuzz-distortion has an octave-up circuit built in (with its own volume control), and the Blend control allows you to roll between the smoother Shadow tones and raspier fuzz of the pedal's Sun side. It's powered from the included battery or a PSU. Available now.
www.ehx.com

TAYLOR BUILDER'S EDITION 814CE **£5,399**
For Taylor, the best just got even better with this Builder's Edition version of its flagship 814ce. The big news is that this marquee Grand Auditorium strummer has gained an Adirondack spruce top. The neck is neo-tropical mahogany, with West African ebony populating the fingerboard and bridge, and it's mollusked-out with a green abalone rosette and mother-of-pearl Taylor inlay. Of course, it features Taylor's unique V-Class bracing, there's a set of Antique Gold Gotoh 510s taking care of the tuning, and it comes loaded with an ES2 Expression System for plugging in.
www.taylorguitars.com

FISHMAN AFX MINI ACOUSTIC PEDALS **£149 EACH**
With the pedal market (ahem) saturated with overdrives and vintage-apeing pedals, acoustic players often get overlooked. But not if you're one of Fishman's friends. Its new AFX Mini line features four acoustic-friendly pedals ranging from problem-solvers to tone-sweeteners with the Pocket Blender (A/B/Y), Pro EQ (preamp/EQ), Broken Record (looper/sampler) and Acoustiverb reverb, which features spring, plate and hall algorithms. Crucially, Fishman says that the effects are all blended in parallel with your dry sound (much like a studio effect would be), rather than on top. They're voiced for acoustic guitars, measure 49 by 49 by 97mm (HxWxD) and feature true/buffered bypass switching options.
www.fishman.com

LR BAGGS HIFI ACOUSTIC BRIDGE PLATE PICKUP SYSTEM **£249**
Put down that drill! There's no need to bore holes in your prized acoustic in order to fit a high-quality pickup/preamp system thanks to LR Baggs' new HiFi High Fidelity Bridge Plate Pickup System. This self-contained solution comprises a pair of bridge plate transducers as well as an end-pin-mounted preamp/jack socket. The controls mount into your guitar's soundhole and everything is held in place by non-destructive peel-and-stick fasteners. LR Baggs even includes a mounting jig to help you get everything in the optimum position.
www.lrbaggs.com

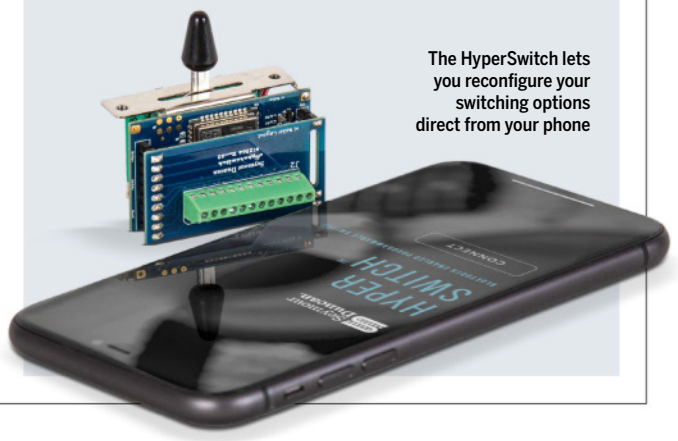
ALSO OUT NOW...

ASHDOWN ENGINEERING MF 484 £1,399

You might have noticed that the way amp brands are pushing their products is changing – in response to the way we use them. For its latest release, the MF 484, Ashdown has paired a 30-watt valve amp with Two Notes' Torpedo cab modelling technology. There are ECC81, ECC82 and a pair of ECC83 valves in the preamp, with four EL84s (hence the name) in the power stage. It's a single-channel amp, but there are two inputs: one voiced for UK-style response, while the US circuit offers a more open sound with greater headroom. Moving along, there's a boost circuit, three-band EQ with Presence, channel volume and master output. The final control gives us access to the six Two Notes speaker emulations, including Celestion Blue, Ruby, G12M Greenback and Vintage 30 options, which in turn fuel a DI socket. There's also a Torpedo input, meaning you could take a raw DI'd guitar track and reamp it back through the amp with ease.
https://ashdownmusic.com

SEYMOUR DUNCAN HYPERSWITCH £209

Have you ever opened your guitar and wondered why making pickup-switching modifications isn't a more accessible process? Seymour Duncan has, and that's exactly what the brand's new HyperSwitch is all about. Install it once and this Bluetooth-enabled five-position switch can be reconfigured instantly via an accompanying smartphone app to provide coil-splitting, reverse your polarity, reassign placement on the switch and more! It's designed for S-type guitars and requires a nine-volt battery (which Seymour Duncan is confident will easily live in your guitar's existing routing) to work. It's a great idea, and we'll be trying one soon.
www.seymourduncan.com



The HyperSwitch lets you reconfigure your switching options direct from your phone

THE LINEUP

Fretbuzz

A monthly look at must-hear artists from all corners of the guitar world, from the roots of their sound to the tracks that matter most

Artist: Louis Campbell

Album: You, Golden (Spafford Campbell Records)

You, Golden Was recorded with fiddle player Owen Spafford whom Louis met in the National Youth Folk Ensemble, a programme that's funded by the Arts Council England
spaffordcampbell.com
https://louiscampbell.bandcamp.com

Louis' custom Fylde Falstaff has a "bizarre neck" that he says was modelled on the wide, piano-like neck of a Gibson archtop

London-based guitarist Louis Campbell already has an impressive CV, studying under the guidance of Martin Simpson and being a key player in folk artist and fiddle player Sam Sweeney's band. Still only in his early 20s, it feels like Louis was born holding a guitar. "My dad played, he did a lot of flamenco," he begins. "He was also into Bert Jansch, so that was always around the house and I thought it was cool. I've been doing it for as long as I can remember. There's so much scope with the guitar; you can play classical or acoustic music on it or use lots of pedals. That's why I love it."

Classical Start

Louis' already accomplished playing has been distilled from a range of influences, many of them arriving before he even hit his teens. "I only ever had classical guitar lessons until a couple of years ago," he explains. "But like most young people I really liked rock music and went through a blues phase for a bit, too. I got into folk music when I was about 12, when there was a big second folk boom."

It was the more contemporary players that initially piqued his interest: "Bombay Bicycle Club and Johnny Flynn and people like that really got me into it," Louis tells us. "Then I worked backwards and found John Martyn and Nic Jones and realised that what my dad had been playing did have an influence."

Learning From The Pros

Louis enriched his academic career by joining the National Youth Folk Ensemble when he was 16. "I wanted to study because you meet loads of people and it gives you the time to really concentrate," he says. "I ended up at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. Technically, I was on the classical guitar course, but they were kind enough to allow me to have half my lessons with external folk guitar players if I passed my exams. I saw Martin Simpson mostly and had a trip up to see Kris Drever, which was great. With those lessons there was very little playing and more talking about music and how they practised and what they thought about. It was probably the most useful stuff I got from college."

Keep It Real

While Louis' musical brain and schedule are equally busy, his philosophy is fairly simple. "The most important thing for me is to play emotive music," he says. "I want people to get something out of it and for it to be an honest representation of my background and interests, so there's a point to it. If I'm trying to play like John Martyn or Martin Simpson, it can be cool, but they could do that better than I ever could. I'm more interested in being honest, both stylistically and in presentation... I really love mistakes; on my favourite albums, be it *Pink Moon* [Nick Drake] or Marc Ribot playing on Tom Waits' [catalogue], it's very raw and real."

The Big Picture

There is an interesting blend of musical styles across Louis' work, bringing in English folk music, of course, plus some post-rock and Bill Frisell-inspired jazz minimalism. This means that both the acoustic and electric guitar are used. "I play the electric like an acoustic guitar player," he smiles. "I use 12s and a high action, but what I love most is pedals. I like soundscapes and sounding less like a guitarist and pretending I'm a piano player. But I'm most comfortable on acoustic; it's better for full-picture stuff, whereas I find the electric is good for creating an atmosphere." **[GK]**

Standout track: *Lullabies*
For fans of: Nic Jones, Martin Simpson, Bill Frisell, John Renbourn

PHOTO BY BECKY CLEASBY

SPEAKING THE TRUTH

Louis' most beloved instruments give him a certain kind of feedback

Louis considers some instruments, such as his Jazzmaster partscaster, as reliable tools for a purpose, but there are some he holds very dear. "I have my old Gibson archtop and Fylde acoustic, both of which have a certain character and make me play a certain way. The Fylde is a 13-fret [to the body] Falstaff with a bizarre neck. Roger [Bucknall] made a mould of my Gibson neck, which has a slight V and is huge and wide. It's like a grand piano, very widescreen and full. It sings best when played minimally, but it has great separation. It really lets you know when you're not playing well!"

PHOTO BY BRADLEY INGHAM

THE LINEUP

Albums

The month's best guitar music – a hand-picked selection of the finest fretwork on wax

PHOTO BY JESSE LIROLA

Guitarist Nuno Bettencourt (far right) takes Extreme into another successful decade with latest album, *Six*

Extreme

Six

Ear Music (release date: 9 June) — **9/10**

Stunning return to form by Boston's top rockers

It's been more than 30 years since Extreme's second album, *Pornograffiti*, hit the shelves and established the band as rivals to Van Halen for the top rockers slot. It also saw Nuno Bettencourt's rise to guitar-superhero status via some of the early 90s' most breathtaking guitar playing. And, of course, the public at large soon became entranced by the mega-hit from the album, *More Than Words*, guaranteeing the band arena status.

The follow-up album, *III Sides To Every Story*, seemed to seal the deal: this band was here to stay. But the fourth album, '95's *Waiting For The Punchline* proved to be the soundtrack to a band falling apart, with a truly terrible mix and lacklustre songs. Sure enough, the band broke up, and the various members went off to engage in solo projects with Nuno turning up at one point as Rihanna's touring guitarist.

Now the band are back and they're stronger than ever. With *Six*'s first single, *Rise* (2.7 million views and counting on YouTube) alerting the ears of guitarists everywhere with a 'how the heck did he do that?' solo from Bettencourt, the album is one of this year's most eagerly awaited releases. The fretboard gymnastics continue throughout the album, with riffs aplenty – *Thicker Than Blood* being a case in point – but the ballads *Small Town Beautiful* and *Hurricane* show that the band can still recall their *More Than Words* heyday. Bettencourt is undoubtedly one of the best rock guitarists on the planet and, from what we hear here, the band aren't back just to pick up a nostalgia paycheck but mean business. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Rise*
For fans of: Van Halen, Whitesnake

Chris Duarte

Ain't Giving Up

Provogue Records (available now) — **8/10**

A Strat-fuelled selection of Texas blues that takes you all the way...

Since the early 90s, Texan blues guitarist Chris Duarte has been wowing fans, live and on record, and his new album demonstrates exactly why. Strat tones with varying degrees of overdrive are his standard tone zone with plenty of vibrant, often groove-rich songs being his forte. *Ain't Giving Up* is his 15th studio album and showcases a breadth of colours from blues to Americana, recorded primarily as a trio with minimal overdubs. With 12 tracks, there's much enthused rhythmic and lead guitar action, from the 12-bar roaring opener *Nobody But You* through to the shuffle-tastic *Gimme Your Love* and the funky *The Real Low Down*. The closing song, *Weak Days*, is a fantastic slow blues that's enriched with some of the album's tastiest free-flowing guitar phrasing, marrying BB King, Hendrix and SRV elements admirably. Indeed, never give up, Chris! **[JS]**

Standout track: *Weak Days*
For fans of: Rory Gallagher, SRV

Metallica

72 Seasons

UIM/EMI (available now) — **8/10**

A deep concept album from the biggest band in metal

72 Seasons is Metallica's first album release in seven years and their 11th to date, and the theme here is that everything we become is based on what happens to us during our first 18 years – or 72 seasons. And with titles like *Screaming Suicide* and *Crown Of Barbed Wire*, we gather the central subject's adolescence was a troubled one... The album clocks in at an hour and 17 minutes and the riffs come thick and fast, right from the opening title track. The brutal duo of Kirk Hammett and James Hetfield lay down an almost impenetrable fog of distorted guitars – though Kirk confirms Greeny was behind many of his tones. Highlights include *Sleepwalk My Life Away*, which recalls the anthemic quality of *Enter Sandman*, and *Chasing Light* with its throbbing riff and screaming vocal. It's a bit short on ballads, but that's really not what we're here for, is it? **[DM]**

Standout track: *If Darkness Had A Son*
For fans of: Megadeth, Slayer

Pat Metheny proves the value of sleeping on an idea with *Dream Box*

PHOTO BY JIMMY KATZ

Pat Metheny
Dream Box
BMG/Modern Recordings (release date: 16 June)

9/10

Forgotten computer files yield a magical album

The story behind this album is that Pat Metheny often records improvised ideas and consigns them to a folder on his computer, where they remain until the trove is reopened. And this is exactly what happened when he rediscovered the files during some idle moments on tour. This then led him to select his favourites in order to create *Dream Box*. The album comprises nine tracks of Pat duetting with himself. "The focus here is on electric guitar – specifically, quiet electric guitar," he states in the album's liner notes. And he's not wrong. The result is a mesmerising insight into the improvising mind of a master musician. Mellow, intensely atmospheric and engaging, the album drifts between different moods, with Pat's melodic guitar at the forefront, interweaving lines and chords. Tracks like *Clouds Can't Change The Sky* and *Never Was Love* drift across the soundscape in an ambient whisper. A beautiful listen. **[DM]**

Standout track: *From The Mountains*
For fans of: Jim Hall, Ralph Towner

Ana Popovic
Power
ArtisteXclusive Records (available now)

8/10

Vibrant new album from the soulful blues chanteuse

Ana Popovic's guitar skills are very well grounded in various styles and the 11 songs on *Power* are vibrant with elements that span from SRV's blues and Prince's funk through to Randy Crawford-esque chill and Stevie Wonder's classic sophistication and warmth. Alongside a great array of musicians, her vocals and guitar shine, from the blazing phrases on soul opener *Rise Up!*, through to the jubilant blues exclamations on *Doin' This* via the rhythmic nylon string fingerpicking on *Luv'n Touch*. The uptempo swagger of *Strong Taste* grooves hard (great blues guitar, too), while the swinging *Deep Down* is harmonically rich and imbued with smart rotary-effect guitar licks. If you like soul blues with elevated groove and a killer band, *Power* is well worth a listen. **[JS]**

Standout track: *Deep Down*
For fans of: Bonnie Raitt, Samantha Fish

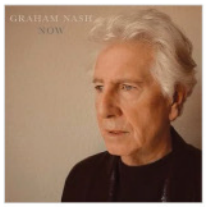
THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

Graham Nash's first studio LP in seven years takes a stern look at the world, but finds room for hope, heart and wonderful acoustic work

Artist: Graham Nash

Album: Now (BMG)



The follow-up to Graham Nash's previous record, 2016's *This Path Tonight*, is worth the wait

Graham will be stretching his tour legs around the States this spring and summer before playing a series of UK dates in August and September

At the grand old age of 81, and with seven years passed since his last studio album, it was hard to shake the impression that Graham Nash had withdrawn to the creative hinterland where rock legends go to wind down, play the hits and tend to their back catalogues.

We should have known better. Half a century since he mobilised the Woodstock generation with Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, the songwriter is brimming with new material on this year's *Now*, squaring up to a modern world that didn't get the 'peace and love' memo, and still in possession of an underrated acoustic touch that weaves among his ageless vocal. We called Nash at his home in California to find out more.

What subjects came up for you on *Now*?

"As I usually am, I was in between being in love and being completely pissed off. The opening line of the record is, 'I used to think that I could never love again.' I mean, how many people have experienced that? On another song, I say, 'My optimism is out of sight.' You can take that any way you want."

PHOTO BY HARRY HERD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

You sound pretty concerned at the state of America on *Golden Idol* and *Stars & Stripes*...

"How could you not be concerned with what's going on here? Look at what's going on politically. Look what's going on environmentally. Look what's going on with the right getting fucking crazy. I don't quite understand how bright Republicans can even be in the same room as somebody like Trump. The guy is a fucking mess. And therefore, because he led the country for four years, this country is now in a mess. I think most people in this country are pretty depressed right now. In a song like *Stars & Stripes*, I'm saying that I really don't like what they're doing to the truth. I mean, stop lying to me, just tell me the truth. We can handle it. Just be truthful."

***A Better Life* urges us to think about what we leave for the next generation. Could it be considered a follow-up to CSNY's classic *Teach Your Children*?**

"You're the third person that's said that, so it must be true, in a way. I didn't write it as a sequel to *Teach Your Children*, but when I listened to the track back – without having to think about whether the drums were loud enough – I could see that it was. And I'm kind of proud of that because I thought *Teach Your Children* was an important song in our genre."

Did you have a vision for this album, either musically or conceptually?

"It always starts out as a collection of songs, but when you get towards the end of the record, you begin to shape it. It was The Beatles and The Beach Boys that really made the album into a journey, not just a collection of A-sides and B-sides to make extra money for the record company. That's what albums used to be. But it was things like *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* and *Sgt Pepper* and *Pet Sounds* – they established that an album needn't just be a collection of hits, it could be a journey. And I've always loved that idea."

Can you tell us about your *Now* setup?

"On this record, I used a couple of interesting guitars. One of them is the guitar that Martin made for me, the Graham Nash model. It sounds as good as any of my other guitars – and you know damn well that I have a lot of guitars! On *Love Of Mine*, I was using a tiny, cheap nylon-string classical guitar that I borrowed

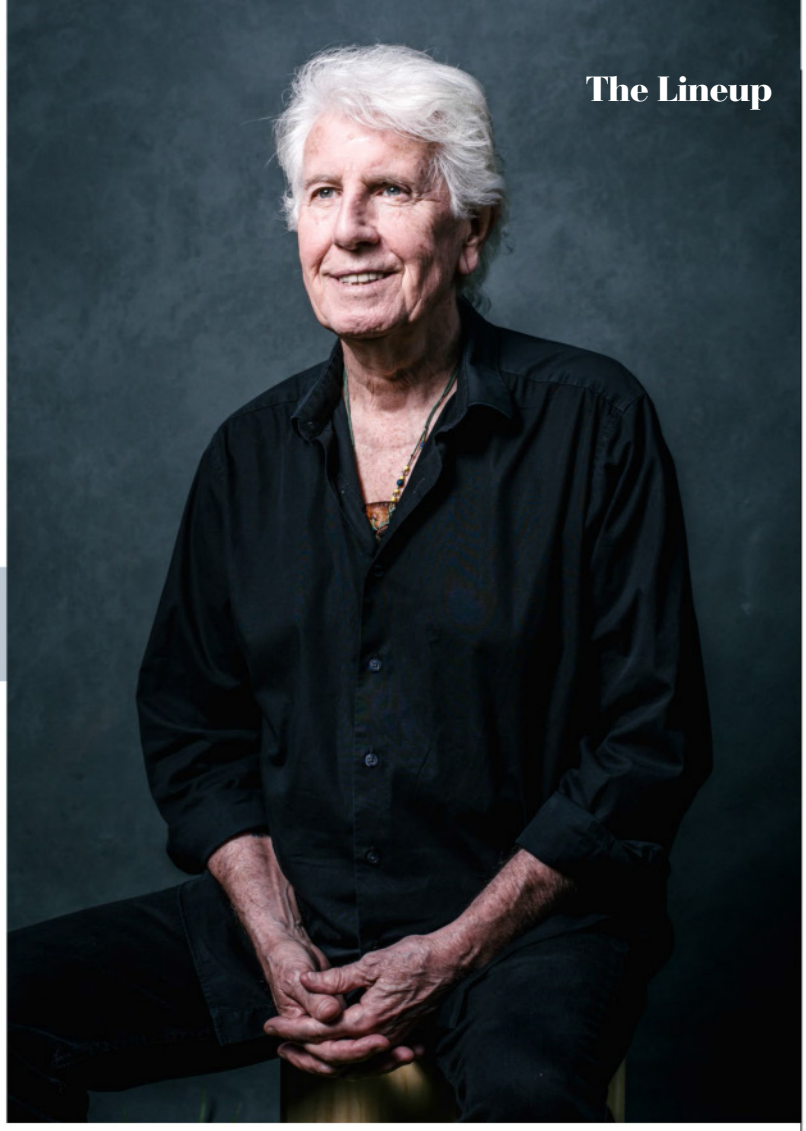


PHOTO BY GARETH CATTERMOLE/GETTY IMAGES

from my co-producer Todd Caldwell's girlfriend, who plays on Broadway shows. I didn't go through an amp on *Now* [Caldwell later emails to confirm that all guitars were mic'd with a Telefunken tube mic]."

Why does that signature model have such good tone for you?

"Well, the Nash Martin is completely quilted mahogany. That's why they only made 142 of them, which is an odd figure for a series, but they didn't have any more quilted mahogany. I was helped a great deal with the design by my guitar tech, John Gonzales, who has been with us for 30 years. And by Alan Rogan, who was the guitar tech for Pete Townshend and became a dear friend. Between us, I think we made a pretty nice guitar. Nice enough for me to use it constantly. Making that guitar was a thrill for me. I mean, come on – Martin Guitars made a guitar, for me? What the fuck?!"

"The Beatles and The Beach Boys established that an album needn't just be a collection of hits, it could be a journey. I've always loved that idea"

New album, *Now*, features a mix of guitars, from Graham's Martin 000-40Q2GN signature to a cheap loaner nylon-string, with longtime guitarist Shane Fontayne also contributing

How did you approach your guitar work on the new album?

"I always come back to what my father taught me. He said, many years ago, 'Never buy a dog and bark yourself.' It was profound. My point is, if I want really great guitars on a track, I'm going to give that to somebody that can really do it. A lot of these new songs on *Now* are somebody else playing lead.

"So on *Buddy's Back*, I sent the basic track to Shane Fontayne, who has been my guitar player for the last 15 years. And I said to him, 'Buddy [Holly] it to death.' That's all I said. He came back and it was brilliant. A lot of this album was done remotely and it was interesting to see – if I didn't say anything – what they would play. Shane and Todd have been playing with me for so long, they know what I love. And they delight in making me smile."

There's some great fingerpicking on *Love Of Mine* and *Follow Your Heart*. How has your acoustic technique evolved over the years?

"You just get better the more you do it. It's like any other muscle in your body. It was Donovan that showed me how to fingerpick and use my right hand, many years ago before I left The Hollies. I'm decent enough to play on my songs, but I'm not Bert Jansch. Does the guitar still hold secrets for me? Oh shit, yeah. Shane shows me a chord and if it touches my heart, I'm off writing a song in that strange new tuning or whatever it was."

How do you feel about your vocal work on *Now*?

"I personally feel that I'm singing better than ever. When you realise how high I'm still singing, it's kind of amazing. I don't understand what's going on. People ask if I do vocal exercises or have a coach. I have nothing. I just sing. That's what I've done all my life, since I was 13 years old. And I love what I do. I'm a musician. I think it's a beautiful thing to be in this world."

What's your emotional state after you've made an album?

"I'm looking at the album cover now and I'm in that nervous state. How are people going to receive this? So far, the response has been fabulous. But you never know. Somebody might just fucking trash it. But I'm excited, too, because I really do believe I've put out a good piece of music and I'm certainly not wasting your time." **[HY]**

Graham Nash's new album, *Now*, is available now on BMG

www.grahamnash.com

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

Epiphone Epiphany

After almost 60 years drooling over the three Beatles' Casinos, **Neville Marten** has finally bagged a USA reissue. But there's more...

Of all the guitars that anyone who knows me would imagine I'd owned, an Epiphone Casino like the one John, George and Paul all played in The Beatles is surely it. And yet, just as I've never had a Rickenbacker 12-string or black Gretsch Duo-Jet, this particular model has always escaped my grasp. Until now! When I reviewed the USA-made E230TD Casino reissue in issue 475 it drove that somewhat incomprehensible point home. I loved it, so when one came up recently I had to bag it.

"McCartney's Casino, although being left-handed, has the exact spec that I like... Thus, a plot was hatched to 'McCartney-ise' mine"

The thing is, all three of the Fabs' guitars were slightly different from one another. Indeed, Keith Richards' Epi was different again. Likewise the reissue, which is a kind of amalgamation of the various incarnations that occurred in the mid-60s. So, where some had a Bigsby, others had a trapeze or other style of vibrato; some featured black plastic pickup covers and others nickel. Some were the reddish 'Royal Tan', others dark sunburst. McCartney's 1962 Casino, although left-handed, has the exact spec that I like, including dark sunburst finish, long Bigsby, nickel pickup covers, and short headstock. My guitar, while also dark sunburst, has a trapeze tailpiece and black plastic P-90s. Thus, a plot was hatched to 'McCartney-ise' mine.

Initially, I was simply going to buy the bits and do the job myself. But over our regular Friday lunchtime coffee (a hangover from lockdown days), David Mead and I decided it would make a good Mod Squad. I approached Dave Burrluck with the idea and he said yes, as we've not done anything quite like it in the series. Having purchased a hard-to-find Bigsby B7, some German nickel silver dog-ear P-90 covers, a set of more correct Kluson tuners, plus some dog-ear shims to raise the pickups as they sit a bit low for my liking, the whole kit and caboodle is winging its way to Mr B's workshop.

While I'm not sure that I'll ever use it in anger, I can't wait to get it back, put on my Pierre Cardin collarless suit, my Anello & Davide centre-seam Cuban heel boots, black knitted silk pencil tie and Beatle wig, and pose for England!

PHOTO COURTESY OF FENDER

GAS OF THE MONTH

"Jet! Woo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

What? Gretsch G6229TG Limited Edition Players Sparkle Jet BT
Where seen? www.peachguitars.com **Price?** £2,495

Speaking as we were of Beatle-ish guitars and how I'd never owned a Duo-Jet, I did take more than a few peeks at this when I first saw it. It's at Peach Guitars in Colchester, but there are a few elsewhere, too. With its chambered mahogany body, Tim Shaw-designed Broad'Tron humbucking pickups, gold Bigsby and the neck set lower into the body than is usual for Gretsch (more like a Les Paul, in fact), and with that stunning Ocean Turquoise Sparkle finish, it's so kitsch it's beautiful. Modernised electrics, locking tuners and powerful pickups mean it's less idiosyncratic than some older-style Gretsches, and its smaller size makes it less unwieldy, too. Would you tire of it and wish you'd bought a black one? Probably. But what a magnificent looking thing it is.

Star Purchase

When Blackstar recently released the Amped 2 pedal amplifier with onboard effects, I thought it looked like an intriguing bit of kit that warranted a look. So I borrowed the review sample, plugged it into our lovely Zilla 1x12 speaker cab and, wow! It sounded fantastic. As well as switchable power from 100 to 20 watts to one watt, with US and UK tonal personalities, there are various drives, fuzz, delay, reverb and modulation – in fact, exactly the stuff I use on my regular theatre gigs. It also has direct recording outputs, balanced front-of-house line and tons more, so I bought one. After showing Eddie Allen, our other guitarist, so did he. We both got super little Pedaltrain Metro cases and now have full rigs in something smaller than a shoebox.

As I've been using a Helix for the past five years and Eddie his Kemper floor pedal, we're still tweaking the drives and effects to get it dead right. With that in mind, I have an idea for Blackstar (nicked from DigiTech's HardWire effects). Those pedals came with a rubber block with recessed holes for the controls: when you'd set your rotaries, done the gig and needed to pack the pedal(s) away, you simply laid the rubber block over the knobs and there they stayed until the next show. Even with the flight case, by the next gig the Amped 2's knobs are never quite where I left them. I'm sure the tooling costs for such a thing would be prohibitive, so perhaps I'll put my mind to a solution. A black-painted balsa wood one with holes drilled for the knobs? If anyone out there has any better ideas, do let me know!

WELCOME TO THE SLINKY FAMILY

ERNIE BALL®

SINCE 1962

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Short Order

For **Alex Bishop**, short-scale guitars are among his best-sounding instruments. As he starts a new build, he considers their benefits

One of the great difficulties in lutherie is figuring out exactly what causes a favourite guitar to sound as good as it does. There are normally too many variables involved to be able to pin down one aspect over another; it could be the woods used, the type of neck join, the finish, the hardware or even the setting in which you're hearing it. However, one of the benefits of enjoying a guitar-making career that spans more than a decade is I now have enough builds under my belt to be able to spot some connections between my top-sounding guitars. In particular, it's the short-scale guitars that invariably prove to be the most successful.

"The scale length is fundamental to a guitar's sound and playability. In fact, when drawing up guitar plans it's the first thing I lay down"

This month sees me return from the sleep-deprived bubble of paternity leave back into the workshop to commence work on a new commission. I'm thrilled to start a new guitar for an enthusiastic and talented client, in part because he has opted for me to build him a short-scale guitar. I've had plenty of time to ruminate on this one in between nappy changes and bleary eyed school runs, so it feels as though the guitar is almost fully formed before I've even glued two pieces of wood.

The scale length is a part of the design of a guitar that is absolutely fundamental to its sound and playability. In fact, when drawing up guitar plans it's the first thing I lay down: a straight line representing the portion of the strings suspended between the nut and the saddle. The rest of the design then emerges from this origin. A lot of short-scale guitars are coupled with a smaller body size; many parlour guitars have a scale length around 620mm (24.4 inches), while a large-bodied Gypsy jazz guitar might go up to 680mm (26.8 inches). The vast majority of acoustic and electric guitars fall within this range. To check the scale length of your own guitar, the recommended method is to measure the distance from the front edge of the nut to the 12th fret, and multiply this number by two.

So, what's the big deal? Well, first off, a shorter scale length instrument will offer lower tension in each string than a longer one. This makes for an easier-going ride on the fretboard, especially for finger-crushing barres or stretchy jazz chords. The reason is simply that shorter strings don't need to be pulled so far to reach the same notes. It also explains why most small instruments reach a higher range than bigger ones: just compare the scale lengths of a double bass and a violin.

You might argue that it's possible to obtain lower tension by just using thinner strings, and you wouldn't be wrong. But the advantages to a short-scale guitar don't stop there. The distance between frets is also reduced accordingly, so hitting all the right notes in fast, fret-leaping solos is made much easier, especially at the higher end of the fingerboard. In the world of marginal gains, short-scale guitars are a big deal.

PHOTO BY CLAIRE CARTWRIGHT

The 12th-fret body joins and lower-tension strings of these shorter scale guitars help produce a sweeter tone than their longer scaled counterparts

How Sweet It Is

A lot of short-scale guitars also tend to have 12th-fret body joins, which somehow encourages the instrument to produce a more sonorous tone, especially in acoustics. In some guitars this is due to the fact that a 12th-fret body join nudges the bridge position a little closer to the edge of the soundboard, helping to excite higher frequencies for a brighter tone. I think the lower tension in the strings can also create a sweeter tone by releasing the energy into the top in a more uneven, organic way, which can be preferable to the more punchy sound of a high-tension setup.

In any case, I hope to build a guitar that disproves the notion that bigger is better. This particular instrument will be a D-hole Gypsy jazz guitar, with Indian rosewood back and sides and a European spruce top, a dream combination that – in my experience – can't go wrong. Assuming I can get some sleep, of course... G

PLAY IN FULL BLOOM

MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL

"All guitarists have a sound in their head – a sound that evolves and grows as they progress, discovering all of the beautiful idiosyncrasies that define their individual voice. To facilitate this process, players need a vibrant, dynamic guitar that becomes a free space in which their personality can unfold. PRS and I designed Fiore to be this guitar."

- Mark Lettieri

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

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For The Record

Jamie Dickson sets to work on an album – a fingerstyle folk record – with help from some very experienced friends and characterful guitars

Over the past five years, I've begun playing more and more fingerstyle acoustic and, with no special goal in mind, I gradually built up a dozen finished pieces that I was pretty happy with. Eventually, I realised that I easily had enough for a long EP, maybe an album, but I wondered if anyone would really want to hear instrumental songs I'd written in our kitchen at home after the family had gone to bed. The thought merited a kind of mental Gallic shrug, but not much more.

But a watershed moment happened when I interviewed fingerstyle master Gordon Giltrap a few months back. Learning one of Gordon's pieces note-for-note from tab in *Guitarist* in the 90s set me on the path to playing fingerstyle acoustic to begin with. Meeting him in person wasn't a disappointment and, over the course of an afternoon of chatting, his encouraging advice and heartening faith that I could make an album out of what I was doing felt like a door being opened for me.

As it happens, while I was chatting to Gordon I had my then-main acoustic with me, a 1974 J-45, which he had a little go on. Hearing him play it expertly, working round its 'quirks', made me realise that although it had a lot of charm, fingerstyle acoustic places a lot of demands on a guitar. You need the notes to be even and perfectly intonated all the way up the neck. The J-45 was a great guitar in many ways and certainly characterful. But I realised that it didn't have the stable, piano-like poise I wanted for recording fingerstyle guitar.

Committing to an idea has an almost magical power to it. No sooner had I decided I was going to do an album and that the J-45 wasn't the guitar for it, I got it sold in just a few days for a good amount, then tracked down a Martin I'd seen advertised on Reverb in my area, a Custom Shop 000-14 that turned out to belong to a former session musician who'd been in the business since the 60s. I went round to try the mahogany-bodied guitar and everything slotted into place: the fretboard was nice and wide, it was perfectly played in, and the tone was resonant and rich. So the deal was done.

Afterwards Gordon, who had been characteristically polite about my J-45 when he'd tried it, got in touch and admitted that he'd thought "maybe it had lacked a little something" – and would I like to borrow his own Fylde signature model when I went into the studio? You won't get an offer like that from your heroes too many times, so I told him I'd gladly take him up on it should the sessions coincide with his next visit down. That's the stamp of one of Britain's greatest acoustic players, generous not just with advice but even with his own personal instrument. You can't ask for better encouragement than that.

One of our greatest fingerstyle acoustic players, Gordon Giltrap was characteristically generous with his advice and encouragement

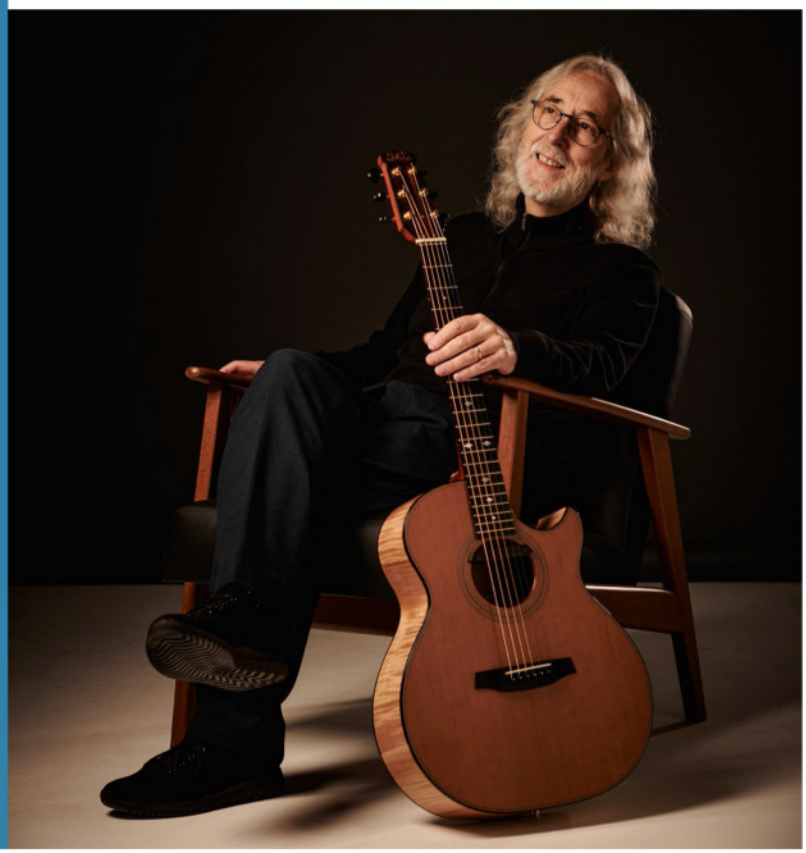


PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER

Introducing A Producer

The last piece of the puzzle was put in place by my friend and *Guitarist* contributor Rod Brakes. I realised if I wanted to do this properly, I couldn't just cobble something together on a laptop at home. I had a couple of good options for recording at local studios, but Rod stopped me and said that I shouldn't do anything until I'd spoken to Chris Turpin of the superb roots-rock band Ida Mae, who had moved into the area recently. I knew Chris already from the times we'd interviewed him and Stephanie Jean of Ida Mae for *Guitarist*, but I hadn't realised he was a big fan of English fingerstyle folk guitarists such as John Renbourn, a player whose work I've loved for decades. Rod explained that Chris had a very well-equipped studio – and might be up for producing me.

I got on the phone to Chris and talked it over and immediately felt we were completely on the same wavelength regarding what the album could be and what it could achieve. Then he surprised me by saying that he was happy to go ahead and produce me and that we should start with a pre-production meeting at his place, so I could perform the material in person for him and we could develop a plan for the recording. I realised then, as I had when talking with Gordon, that I was being invited by a highly skilled musician to take my own project seriously – to regard it not just as a chance to record some more-or-

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

Chris Turpin and Stephanie Jean of the stellar roots-rock outfit Ida Mae. Chris is also a brilliant producer with a longtime interest in British fingerstyle folk guitar

less competent playing for a lark, so to speak, but to make a proper record with a distinctive sound and style, and with genuine musical integrity and quality.

These exchanges led me to realise something. Modesty is a noble quality – and I genuinely believe all artists should exercise a bit of humility, if only to acknowledge the fact that inspiration, when it strikes, often seems to come from a larger place beyond our everyday selves. But to be an effective artist, you also have to pick up the gauntlet and dare to believe you can achieve something of genuine worth, even when you know your own talents aren't as great as the masters that inspired you. That's not arrogance or boastfulness; it's just committing to the work. Both Gordon and Chris helped me see that, which is in turn the mark of serious artists who do this every day.

"You have to dare to believe you can achieve something of genuine worth... it's not arrogance or boastfulness, just committing to the work"

A few days later, I took my Martin round to see Chris at his home. Unsurprisingly for an artist who used to work in vintage guitar shops back in the day, he's got some lovely instruments, from a custom redwood Fylde he'd recently had built for him by Roger Bucknall to a 1936 Gibson L-00. Before turning up, Chris had asked me to send over a playlist of acoustic recordings that sounded good to me. Accordingly, I sent him tracks from Pierre Bensusan's 1975 album *Près De Paris*, especially the beautiful *Dame Lombarde*, and things like John Renbourn's *The Moon Shines Bright* and John Martyn's *Solid Air*. Chris pointed out how different these tracks were to the glistering, wide-stereo sound that seems to be the standard for many fingerstyle recordings today. Instead of pin-sharp clarity, they had warmth and grain and an analogue directness that cut straight to the heart of things. Chris told me that he had some vintage mics and that he'd love to set up some recording rigs that really delved back into the methods of the 60s and 70s studios. This was just exactly what I wanted to hear – it felt like a key turning in a lock.

Next time round, if you're interested, I'll share a little of the recording techniques, mic setups, guitars and more that Chris and I used to start tracking the album. In the meantime, it's back to the studio.

THREE TO GET READY

Coated strings to suit acoustic studio work

Elixir Phosphor Bronze Nanoweb 12-53 £19.99

They're expensive, but these coated strings have excelled in all the studio sessions we've used them for. The main benefit is the reduction in squeaks and other handling noise offered by the Nanoweb coating, which also extends string life. Don't be scared of coated strings, they can be really flattering.

Curt Mangan Medium Light Phosphor Bronze Coated 12-54 £23.99

An American brand known for its attention to detail, Curt Mangan's coated acoustic strings impress. For fingerstyle, the warmth of phosphor bronze always seems a natural choice, though this set seemed, to our ears, to be a little more detailed than the Elixirs above, if a smidge less squeak-free.

Stringjoy Foxwoods Coated Phosphor Bronze 12-54 £16.99

Based in Nashville, the home of all things guitar, the Foxwoods are Stringjoy's premium coated set and they sounded really nice, breathy and detailed but also just a little different from the herd when we tried a set on a Martin 000-14. The likes of JD Simo sing Stringjoy's praises and with good reason.

AUDIO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

Altered Dominant Chords

Richard Barrett explains how these dissonant chords come into their own in progressions and how they resolve to regular major or minors

Let's start with a bit of jargon-busting: a dominant chord is the 'full' name for a 7th chord, the type with a ♭7th rather than a major 7th. When we describe a chord as 'altered', this means one (or more) of the notes has been raised or lowered away from its normal diatonic position – which, by the way, does not include the ♭7th itself! It's perfectly possible to alter regular major and minor or major 7th chords, too, but we have to start somewhere and altered dominants are by far the most widely used.

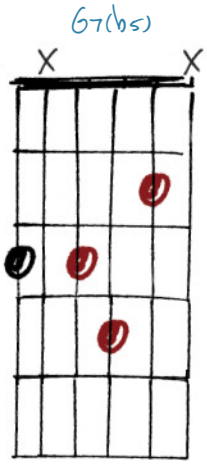
Played on their own, the examples below may seem quite dissonant. Where they really come to life is in a chord progression, and you'll often hear them 'resolving' to other more 'standard' chords. See the examples themselves for more about this. Finally, be aware that occasionally chord tones may be omitted for practical reasons (five fingers/six strings!) and extensions don't always appear on the fretboard in 'scale order'. G

PHOTO BY SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Pat Metheny's understanding of altered harmony allows him to make some interesting note choices when improvising

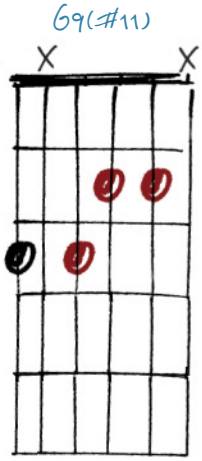
Example 1

This G7(♭5) features the ♭5th (D♭) at the top. It isn't a particularly dissonant chord, but if followed with an F#maj7, you will appreciate that it sets up a certain tension or expectation, rather like a sus chord. Note that the 5th (D) is omitted where you might normally find this on the fifth string.



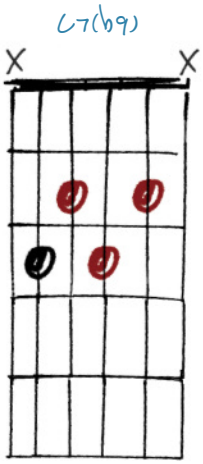
Example 2

This G9(#11) omits the major 3rd (B) on the fifth string, which is easy to add back in at the 2nd fret if you want to hear an alternative voicing. The dominant 7th (F), 9th (A) and #11th (C#) appear on the fourth, third and second strings respectively.



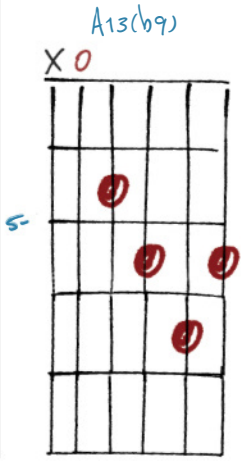
Example 3

This C7(♭9) gives us the root (C), major 3rd (E), dominant 7th (B♭) and ♭9th (D♭) on the fifth, fourth, third and second strings respectively. You can raise the D♭ to D for a C9 for context. Also, try resolving this to an Fmaj7 like a V-I progression.



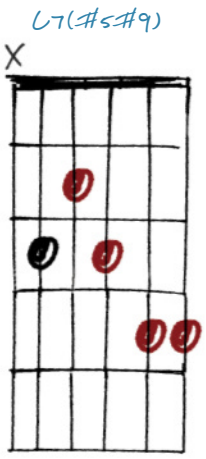
Example 4

Using the open fifth string as our root, this A13(♭9) also features the dominant 7th (G), major 3rd (C#), 13th (F#) and ♭9th (B♭) on the fourth, third, second and first strings respectively. It can also function as a V-I resolve if you head to D or Dmaj7.



Example 5

This C7(#5#9) does not feature the extensions in scale order, even though they do appear this way in the name! Our root, 3rd and dominant 7th (C-E-B♭) appear on the fifth, fourth and third strings respectively, with the #9 (D#) and #5 (G#) appearing on the second and first strings.



REAL PLUGIN

LA-STUDIO

REAL TUBE HEAD | Two notes AUDIO ENGINEERING | SUPERGROUP DESIGN

Laney BLACK COUNTRY CUSTOMS HANDCRAFTED IN THE UK Two notes AUDIO ENGINEERING

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Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.
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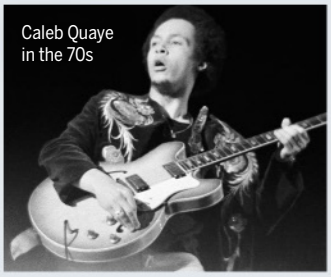
STAR LETTER

FORGOTTEN GEMS


Caleb Quaye in the 70s

The other day I saw a reference to the New Zealand band Split Enz. I recalled being given their *Mental Notes* debut album at Christmas 1975 and loved it, especially the track *Time For A Change* and the guitar solo at the end. The solo was, I believe, played by Wally Wilkinson, but he was chucked out of the band soon after the album's release, and I can't find any mention of his subsequent, or previous, career anywhere on the internet.

I started to think back to other solos I loved back then but haven't heard since. For example, Caleb Quaye's quite remarkable solo at the end of Ralph McTell's *Old Brown Dog*, from the 1971 album *You Well-Meaning Brought Me Here*. How many of your younger readers have heard Tony Peluso's brilliant fuzz solo on The Carpenters' *Goodbye To Love*? And when *Wuthering Heights* is played on the radio they generally fade out just as the late Ian Bairnson gets into his wonderful solo.

I'd love you to run an article, along the lines of, '100 Great Guitar Solos You May Never Have Heard'. I'm sure your readers and friends in the business would love to contribute their own rarely-heard gems.

Clive Gibson-Leitch

Thanks for writing in, Clive – we agree the best solos are like little compositions in themselves, which both serve the song and yet stand alone as gems of musical genius. To our minds, Brian May is perhaps the most accomplished rock player in this respect. Think of the solo on *Killer Queen*, not a note wasted yet perfectly structured with a cascade of notes that both reinforce the main theme of the song and embellish upon it. We've long felt the best, most satisfyingly memorable solos can be easily sung note for note, such as that of *Hotel California*, which underscores the importance of melody, not just dexterity, in soloing. But there are always exceptions, such as Eddie Van Halen's solo in *Beat It*, which in fairness is brilliant but would be a challenge to whistle! Our favourite unsung solo? Well, there are many, but we feel Larry Carlton's solo on *Nite Crawler* is even more stupendous than his better-known solos on *Kid Charlemagne* and *Room 335*. What are your nominations? Write in and we'll print the best.

PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a pair of Vox VGH AC30 guitar amplifier headphones!
www.voxamps.com

STRUGGLING ARTIST

Edition 498 of the magazine had an article that totally piqued my interest – 1970s guitars. Despite the diligent cover of the lawsuit guitars of Japan, the novelty of Travis Bean and Kramer, and a half decent summary of what Gibson achieved while under the ownership of Norlin, there was a gaping hole. Bill Lawrence was mentioned for his pickup sorcery, but nowhere was there an acknowledgement of Gibson's greatest off-piste instrument, the sublime and seminal 1977 RD Artist. It still out-tones, outperforms, out-looks and outplays any other guitar I've played or owned, with under-the-bonnet active circuitry from the then Norlin-employed Dr Robert Moog.

I've owned mine (bought new) since 1978, and can vouch that it's the most eminently exciting, timeless looking, comfortable, chameleon-toned, effortlessly playable guitar I've ever played. Bar none. And that includes high-end Fenders, Washburns, custom Hugh Manson shredders and other Gibsons that have all pulled me to a purchase. I've played seriously for 48 years and the 1977 Gibson RD Artist is the finest playing and recording SB/electric guitar that ever came from Kalamazoo or Nashville.

Brian Towell

Accept our apologies, Brian. The RD Artist is indeed a quintessentially 70s guitar with its then bleeding-edge tone-tweaking circuitry. It has been overlooked somewhat in subsequent years, but at least one well-known player (outside of Steve Howe) feels the same way you do about its unique shape, as Epiphone's Lee Malia RD Custom Artisan, launched but a few years ago, attested. They seem to be appreciating in value a bit, too!

LOVED & LOST

Responding to Neville Marten's feature on gear we wish we still had [Neville's Advocate, issue 498], in the late 1970s I bought a white Fender Strat to partner my 1976 Gibson Les Paul. A chip appeared somewhere on the body and there was a glimpse of wood figuring beneath. I like wood so I stripped it to reveal a lovely ash body that I treated with Danish oil, which I much preferred. Great maple neck, jumbo frets, played really well, but I didn't think it sounded 'Stratocaster' enough, so I sold it.

Shortly afterwards I saw a video someone had taken of a band performance I was in and couldn't believe what I heard – the most Fender-y sound ever! Great 70s Strat that sadly got away. I have an Eric Johnson model now, which I love, but it's not quite the same.

Steve Mitchell

Sitting comfortably amid its Gibson brethren above, Brian's beloved RD Artist is an unsung 70s hero

We fully sympathise with you, Steve. You're far from alone in deciding to sell a guitar that later seemed to sound brilliant in someone else's hands! Very frustrating, but it's further evidence that we always leave ourselves out of the tone equation – some guitarists speak of having 'bright hands' and even the difference between the types of plectrum (or fingers) used by individual players, allied to their unique touch on the instrument, can mean that guitars we can't click with ourselves come to life in the hands of another player. That said, we're also so rarely in a position to stand back and enjoy the sound of our own instruments – so it shouldn't be surprising that we don't always get the full measure of how good they are before we sell them!

MAKING A MARK

As a fairly late starter to playing the guitar I have learned very quickly indeed that tone and expression is "all in the fingers", as Neville Martin so accurately states [issue 498]. All the gear in the world won't make you a better player (according to my wife, especially anytime I go near a guitar shop). Fun to have all the toys, though.

As a bit of a garden-shed luthier, I can also say with some confidence that the crafting of a decent guitar is also "all in the fingers" and that there is a small breed of makers that can craft base materials into something as truly magical as a guitar. Can I throw

After a decade of drawer time, John's Höfner Razorwood (pictured, right and far right) was given some TLC via various additions and mods – and now receives much enjoyable play time

my weight behind the idea of having a regular slot about independent luthiers as flagged up by reader Stephen Pheasant's letter? I am sure that I would not be alone in finding this a fascinating addition to the magazine as well as providing a showcase for the extraordinary level of talent and innovation in guitar making there is out there.

Glenn Holman

Thanks, Glenn, we've already started cueing up independent makers to take a closer look at, either in a new series of features or in existing regulars like Blueprint or editor Jamie's Raising The Tone column. So watch this space...

RAZOR'S EDGE

The Historic Hardware on Hugh Cornwell's Höfner by David Mead [issue 497] has prompted me to share my own Razorwood. I bought the unfinished body at one of the early Guitar Shows at the NEC or Wembley, from a Yorkshire dealer. It was a bare body in the original SL7 shape, and remained in the loft for a few years. I eventually built it up with quite a lot of help with a Tele neck, left-handed trem, three WD Texas Specials, a custom scratchplate, and two inlaid silver earrings. It didn't last. Just couldn't get on with it, and eventually dismantled it and moved on.

The body then spent several years in a drawer in my workshop while I deliberated what to do, deciding that the reason for not getting on with the original guitar must have been its shape. I thought about a recarve.

A chance chat with a friend revealed he had an early 'fat' Höfner bass neck and a Bare Knuckle rewound 61/62 Diamond Bass pickup. A deal was quickly agreed and thoughts returned to the languishing body. Pickup surround, Höfner bridge and Gotoh tuners came via the internet, and I designed a brass string anchor and set it into the curved rear of the body along with a reversed Strat-style jack socket. The neck is attached by a custom plate and a brass insert covers the trem routing. I made a new scratchplate and finished the body with Danish oil and plenty of elbow grease. Flat-wound strings and Gibson knobs on CTS pots complete the look.

It sounds like a Höfner, is comfortable to play and gets regular outings. So I'm happy – but should I have left it alone? You decide...

John Reed

We admire your commitment to resurrecting your Höfner, John, and the ingenious and elegant carve that gave it a new lease of life in your hands. The question of whether to leave a guitar original or radically modify it is one only the individual owner can decide upon, however. But, as interesting as the Razorwoods are, they're probably more ripe for guilt-free modification than a 60s Strat, for example, and, at the end of the day, the changes transformed it from a workshop curiosity to a regularly played guitar – which is what all instruments should be.

Christopher's Gibson Corvus 1 may divide opinion, but it had a solid gigging career once pimped with new pickups

CORVUS OF APPROVAL

As a young teacher in the late 70s and early 80s, on a low wage, there was little left over to buy a good guitar. I had a succession of cheap and nasty pawn-shop clunkers. I read everything I could on how guitars were made. With skip wood and cheap hand tools, I made several Frankenstein guitars and I scoured *Melody Maker* small ads for guitar parts. One time I got really lucky on a £10 lucky dip box of pickups, tuners, screws, springs, etc, but in that miscellany was a DiMarzio X2N humbucker. Back then, they were retailing at over £80.

My 'homemades' were test rigs for all manner of wiring setups. As a fee for some postal tuition, I received a Seymour Duncan Hot Strat Stack. Both pickups went in some of my homemades. Then I saw an ad from Peter Cook's guitar store, including a Gibson Corvus 1 with hard case and delivery for £160,

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

which was a lot of money in the mid-80s. I maxed out my credit card. But when it arrived, I was in seventh heaven. A real Nashville-made Gibson. No matter that it looked weird, hardly anyone liked it, but it was a real Gibson, with a neck that was as easy to play as putting on your comfy slippers.

It was about then *The Guitar Handbook* by Ralph Denyer [first published in 1982] came out, and I set about using the circuit diagrams from the book to make an ultimately versatile guitar. The Hot Strat Stack was plumbed into the Corvus's neck position for a Shadows tone. The X2N went into the middle position for the heavier material, while the Corvus's own Alnico V bridge humbucker remained in place for the bluesy material.

This magnificently ugly guitar saw service at gigs from 1986 through to 2003. After my wife bought me a real 1997 Les Paul Standard in 2001, the Corvus went into semi-retirement. It came out when my friends and I played for my daughter's wedding. It comes out now and again for nostalgic purposes, or to answer a student's curiosity. A Gibson is a Gibson, no matter which model it is.

Christopher Gardner

Thanks for writing in to stand up for what is, in all honesty, a bit of an unfancied guitar. That said, the editor of this tome remembers the peculiar thrill of seeing an orange-finish Corvus in an Edinburgh guitar shop back in the 90s. Just for a moment he was tempted to join you in the owners' club, so strikingly sci-fi it seemed (and its low price was also tempting to the student he then was). He bought a Nighthawk in the end (another under-appreciated Gibson, but that's a story for a different day) but never forgot that first time he clapped eyes on a guitar that looked like it had been designed by aliens and yet played very nicely and sounded pretty good, if memory serves.

We're glad yours has given you so much satisfaction over the years and agree it's maybe time the poor old Corvus came out of the sin bin of history. It was never going to be a classic, styling-wise, but that doesn't mean it can't rock, as you have so faithfully proven.

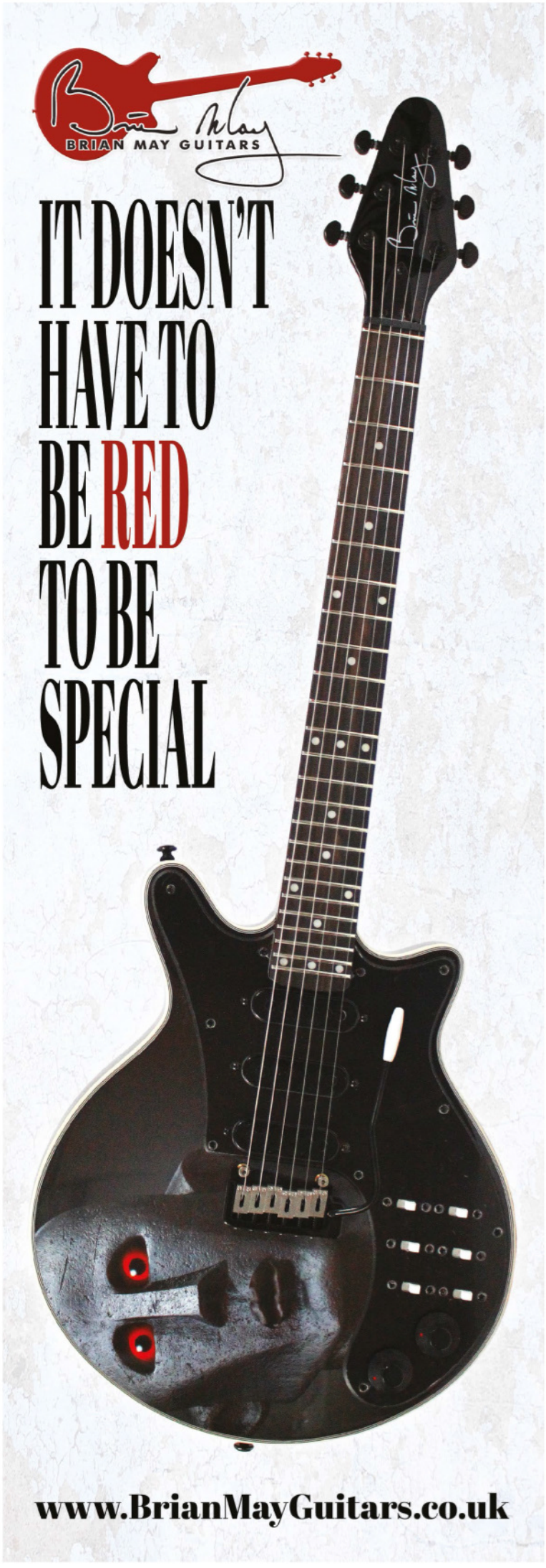


PHOTO BY PAMELA LITTKY

RIVAL SONS

As the Californian rockers release their "cinematic" seventh album, Scott Holiday invites us into his jaw-dropping guitar room to talk mad-scientist fuzz pedals, the merits of musical brainwashing, and why he's no longer a modder

Words Henry Yates

No wonder Scott Holiday wants the webcam on. As engaging as the Rival Sons guitarist undoubtedly is, it's hard to stop yourself peering past him at the treasure trove that is his home guitar room in Los Angeles. Over his shoulder, you'll spot rarities, antiquities, prototypes, esoteric one-offs and several hundred stompboxes stacked into a true-bypass Hadrian's Wall. "This is an opportunity to show off my toys," beams the man nicknamed Mr Fuzzlord. "It's a guitar magazine. You actually want to see this stuff."

Holiday is the best kind of connoisseur. Rather than keep his collection under glass cloches, swiped only with a duster, the 47-year-old has used his gear in anger on the Rival Sons catalogue since 2009's debut, *Before The Fire*. And while atmospheric seventh release, *Darkfighter*, represents another kick against the notion that the Californians are 70s acolytes adrift in the wrong century, Holiday is quick to remind us that his gear tastes span beyond vintage. "I'm way more relaxed than that," he considers. "I'm looking to explore and create new sounds."

How do you feel when you go into the studio to make a Rival Sons record?

"Mostly excited. Working with a producer like Dave Cobb, I know he's gonna throw curveballs and the songs are gonna take left and right turns. I have a group of guys that are all very proficient. They're all really wonderful players. So everybody is fighting to make a statement, as well as supporting the track. It's a lot of energy filling up the room. I don't have any backseat players."

You've used the word 'cinematic' to describe your new album. Tell us more...

"Even if you go back to *Before The Fire* [2009] and tracks like *The Man Who Wasn't There* and *Flames Of Lanka*, there's a cinematic quality I've always wanted to harness, which sucks you in and paints a picture. I've always prided myself on being that kind of player, where I'm more into painting with colour. I don't need to play all the notes at a very high speed. I can appreciate that in players, but I'm looking for texture and colour. That's how I listen to music. Although I love a good rock 'n' roll guitar solo, too – and plenty of fuzz."

For you, who are the guitars players who excel at that textural approach?

"Certainly, guys like Dave Gilmour. I think Nels Cline is a big colour painter. A lot of the prog guys. I mean, I think Page was a big colourful guitar player like that. Nick Zinner from the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. The Edge was a great textural player. Not seemingly a technical player to anybody, and he took a lot of shit for having to use the delay – but it was really appropriate. If you're looking at what he's doing with U2, they did not need Larry Carlton. I'm gonna mention Jeff Beck because I miss him already. How does a blues guitar player become the biggest prog phenom ever? They're all textural players."

Is it inadequate to call Rival Sons a 'blues-rock' band?

"I hear that all the time. We even play blues festivals. I don't get it at all... but I do get it. We can play the shit out of some blues-rock, but I'd say there's probably a lot of acts that do it better if that's what you're looking for."

Having said that, there's a few raging solos...
"Sometimes, you have to pop a wheelie, man. I aimed at economy for the most part. I appreciate a guitar player like John Frusciante, who we know can spray [virtuosity] all over us but often will play a strong melody and counterpoint. And it's like, dude, the restraint and wisdom it took to do that. I was aiming at that on this record. But with that said, there's some raging shit. On the track *Darkside* you'll hear a big, open, very Gilmour-esque solo. I like the attack on the bridge from *Nobody Wants To Die*. I think that's a good, toothy, boisterous, raucous guitar solo. *Mirrors*, for me, is almost a nod to a proggy Zappa kinda thing. It's a guitar player's record."

You've said you got further away from your influences on this album.
"Well, I don't want to sound pretentious or self-important. I don't want it to sound like, 'I'm so flippin' original that I no longer need my influences' – which would just be ridiculous. You need them forever. It's a wellspring. The point is, when we're younger players, we lean on our influences more. Every artist does that. And you can hear that progression as they move away. I just name-dropped a bunch of people, but in writing this record with Jay [Buchanan, singer] and how I approached colour, texture, soloing and arrangement, it wasn't based so much on my heroes. It wasn't like, 'I'm gonna do a dirty little Yardbirds thing here.' There's plenty of influence on this record. But we're feeling more like ourselves."

1. Scott worked with Gretsch master builder Stephen Stern in the making of his fully hollow Falcon, which is loaded with TV Jones Super'Trons

2. Scott's live rig includes a wall of Supro and Orange combos, while Supro's small and discontinued 1600 Supreme made a big impact in the studio

3. Made by Matt Hughes of Banker Guitars, this custom doubleneck combines standard and baritone necks and enables Scott to authentically bring the album's songs to life on the live stage

4. Scott's live 'board features a mixture of mass-market and boutique pedals and is but a snapshot of the extensive collection within his home studio

5. Scott's live setup also includes a Line 6 Helix Floor and Custom Audio Electronics RS-T MIDI Foot Controller

PHOTO BY PAMELA LITTKY

Do you have any favourite memories from the sessions?
"I don't drink or do drugs. When we're working, that's not to say it isn't lighthearted, but it isn't a party. It's much more labcoats than shots and chicken wings. But my best memory is cutting the song *Darkfighter* in this studio that Dave Cobb built in the back of his house in Savannah, Georgia. It's a nice studio, but it's small in comparison to RCA Studio A, where we did the rest of the album. That song is an epic that we've been working on a long time. We cut it live and really improvised. It's captured very much like our old-school days. Reawaken the wild animal, y'know? With the song *Darkside*, I remember everybody celebrating my solo and everything just sounding right. Every once in a while, it's like that in the studio. As you're laying it down, you're saying, 'Holy shit, this is sounding good.'"

Did you use any new approaches that pushed you out of your comfort zone?
"I use something I call the 'mind eraser'. I believe you can learn so much that it's hard to have fun. So I try to flatten everything out and approach writing and guitar from a fresh perspective. I try to use unfamiliar tunings, unfamiliar modes, unfamiliar scales. Like, 'forget everything you know'. That's certainly how I approached this record and I find it puts me into different positions on the neck and makes me create different phrasing."

What's the hardest thing to play on this album?
"More than technical skill, there's a lot of nuance throughout the record. What I try to do – more than 'this is my ultra-technical *Eruption*-type solo' – is nail the feel. So if a player is going to play the solo on *Mirrors* or *Darkside*, the key to it won't just be the notes, it'll be getting in and out of that phrasing, because it is so deeply buried in my voice. Like when I was a kid and I'd try to learn Van Halen and I realised, 'I can learn these parts, but I can really tell this is his voice.' I think there's plenty of that happening on this record."

Do you think you can hear your state of mind in your guitar playing?
"I think it depends on what kind of listener you are. Guitar is never going to resonate like a voice and words for some people, but for those of us who listen to music with an acute ear, and you can listen to a horn and feel the emotion – I've done my best to put emotion to tape."

Can you tell us about your *Darkfighter* setup?
"My producer is a collector and he has everything. But what I always find myself returning to in the studio is small amps. There's a Supro called the 1600 Supreme that's not being made any more. It's a modern amp, but it's very old-school-sounding. It's just a small single-channel amp that sounds really good, man. No reverb, nothing. I had this big Bradshaw rig built and I ran that entire rig into that tiny speaker.

"Because I have this silly moniker, Mr Fuzzlord, I obviously had to pick some pedals. Isle Of Tone build these very boutique vintage-style fuzzes. They're crazy. They just made me this beautiful custom pedal [holds up stompbox named 'Mr Fuzzlord']. It's essentially like a hopped-up Fuzz Face. It's so organic and chewy and articulate – and it gets so out of control.

PHOTOS OPPOSITE COURTESY OF SCOTT HOLIDAY

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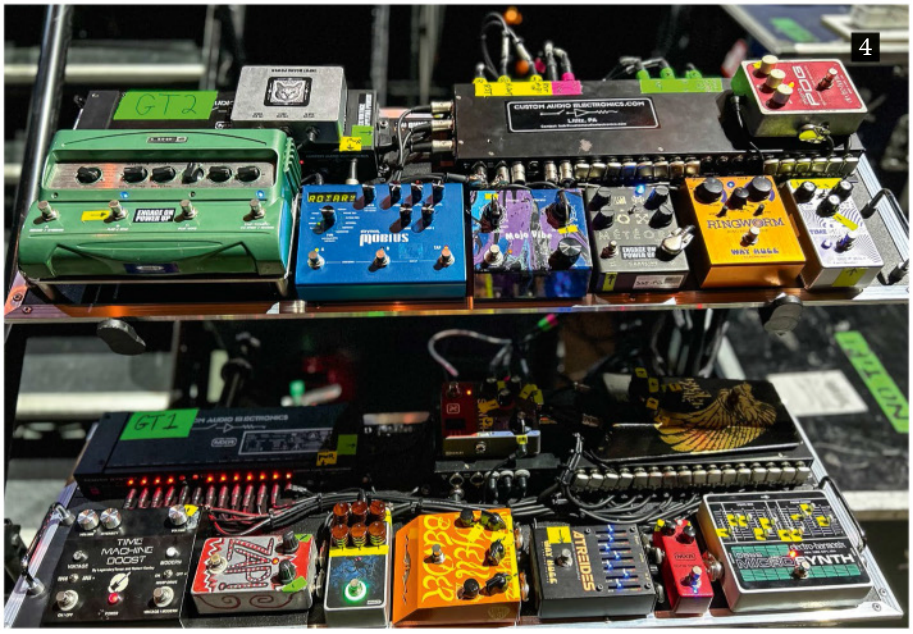

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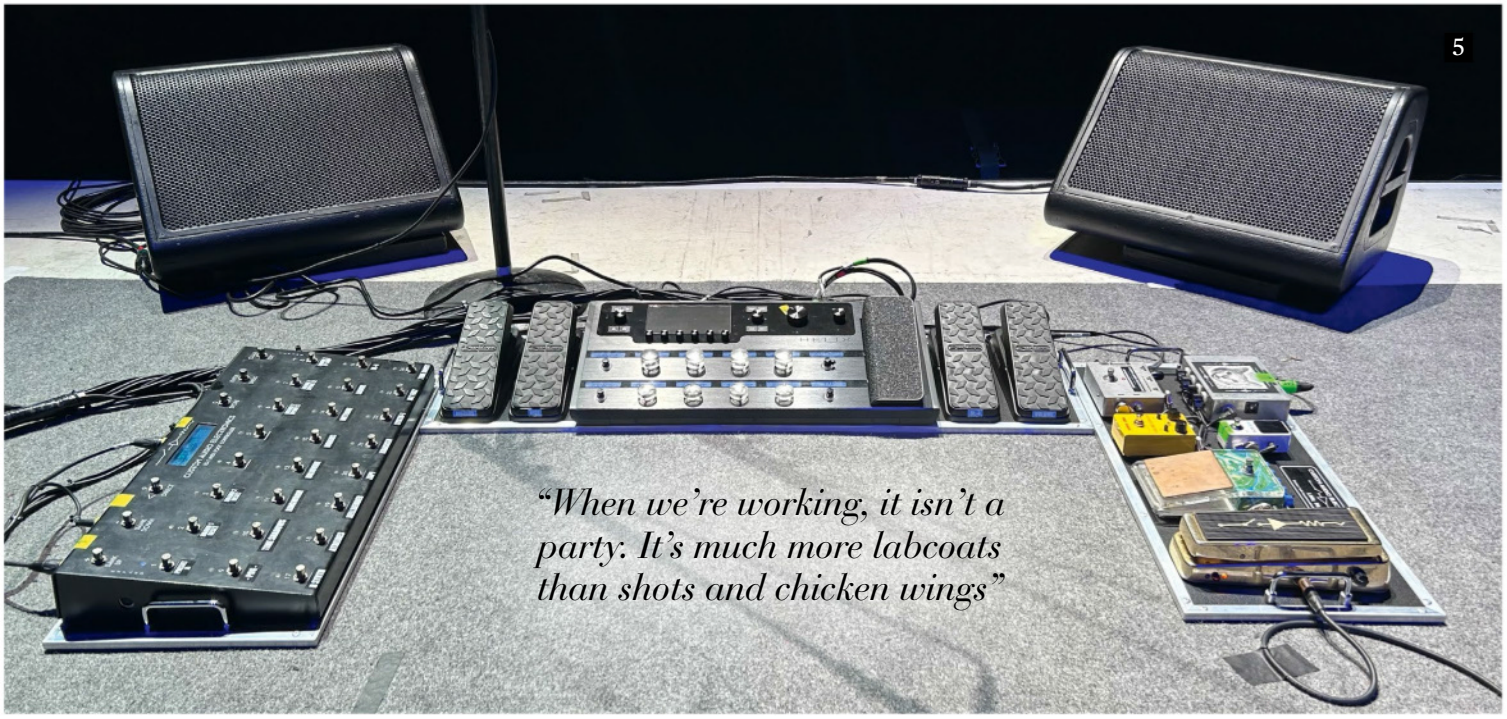

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"When we're working, it isn't a party. It's much more labcoats than shots and chicken wings"

6. This Deep Sea Kraken OctaFuzz Generator is made by KossekFX, a side-project by pedal hobbyist Peter Kossek. During Scott and Peter's exchange of ideas, Scott spec'd the maritime feel of the wooden knobs and illuminated Kraken eyes. "That pedal was an MVP," says Scott of The Kraken's role on *Darkfighter*

7. Scott's Mr Fuzzlord pedal from Isle Of Tone is a fully handmade, small-enclosure prototype of the company's Haze 69 Fuzz. Founder Johannes Huber pre-selects Mullard silicon transistors first by their measured values and then matches everything by ear

"Then I designed a pedal with KossekFX out of Denmark [named the Deep Sea Kraken OctaFuzz Generator]. It became this eight-stage octave fuzz. I said, 'It's gotta be named The Kraken and have old wooden control knobs like you found it on a pirate ship. And the Kraken's eyes light up when you engage it.' It's got a really low sub-octave and a high octave. So I used that on a handful of songs. That pedal was an MVP.

"*On Bird In The Hand*, the digital-sounding hard fuzz in the verses is another favourite pedal I discovered, the Keeley Synth-1. It's not even a fuzz, it's like a synth keyboard sound. But I'm giving away all my secrets!"

How about the guitars on this record?

"I don't think my usual '99 blue Firebird was even used. I had a bunch of new guitars. There was a custom Falcon I did with Stephen Stern over at Gretsch. It's got Super'Trons by TV Jones and I can split them. The body is all hollow. It's super beautiful and it kinda tells a story.

"But I also used some new builds that I got from my good friend Matt Hughes over at Banker Custom Guitars. He built me a really beautiful korina V to historic spec and I asked him to put a Bigsby on, like Lonnie Mack style. And I'm not saying I started the trend, but you're starting to see that Lonnie Mack thing everywhere again now. So I used that and my '66 330 a whole bunch on the record.

"As for acoustics, at Carter's in Nashville, they always have the best Martins in their acoustic room. They had a specific pre-war that was a real cannon. They're really expensive: you're getting into the $18,000 to $25,000 zone. So I didn't get it. But the one I was looking at, Dave Cobb brought back to the studio and we used it."

Anything else in your *Darkfighter* rack?

"Mixing standard and baritone guitars was a recipe we used on songs like *Bright Light*, *Rapture* and *Darkside*. I have a Kauer Banshee baritone, but in the midst of this record, I started thinking, 'I have to make a goddamn doubleneck baritone so I can play these songs live.' I asked Gretsch and, of course, they said, 'It's too expensive.' So I went to Matt at Banker and said, 'Would you be adventurous?' And Matt said, 'Hell, yes, let's do it.' So Banker made me this custom baritone and six-string doubleneck [pictured on the previous page]. I also used Dave's '54 Esquire all over the record. It's one of my favourite-ever guitars because of its simplicity. The Telecaster is so manly, right?"

As a young player, you used to mod your guitars. Do you still?

"I'm not taking them apart these days, honestly, because the guitars I'm getting are from, like, Stephen Stern or Matt at Banker. I don't need to do it. I have guys that are much better at wiring and doing things cleanly, so I don't have to reopen it up and do a nasty little job."

You have a reputation as an old soul. Is there a certain vintage that you won't stray beyond?

"No, I find that too precious. I get why guys are like, 'Hell, I use my Fender Twin and my '58 Les Paul.' But that's not me. I'm building new things. Things that have never been made. Like, the stuff I'm showing you is new things."

Finally, there are also rumblings of an album sequel, *Lightbringer* – what's the status?

"Just last night, I got the final masters. You'll be able to tell it's all part of the same project. *Darkfighter* is a cinematic album, and with *Lightbringer* you're still watching the same film." G

Rival Sons' new album, *Darkfighter*, is set for release on 2 June on Atlantic

www.rivalsons.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF KOSSEKFX

PHOTO COURTESY OF ISLE OF TONE

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THE Guitarist INTERVIEW

DARK GREEN

Metallica's new album, *72 Seasons*, is as brutal as any the behemoth metal band has made to date. But listen closer and you might pick out a richly familiar voice among the guitar tones. We join Kirk Hammett to hear how Peter Green's famous 'Greeny' '59 Les Paul, and the new USA reissues of the guitar, have changed his viewpoint on high-gain playing since the guitar has been in his care. We also learn Kirk's candid views on the "end of the age of active pickups", as well as the apparent disclosure of an Epiphone replica of Greeny in the pipeline...

Words Jamie Dickson

Kirk Hammett's wiry, wah-scorched lead tones have been a core component of Metallica's sound since the band reshaped the landscape of metal in the early 80s. Now 60 years of age, Kirk's youthful looks mask the fact that he's been recording at the sharp end one of the world's biggest acts for 40 years, after he replaced Dave Mustaine in the band in the spring of 1983.

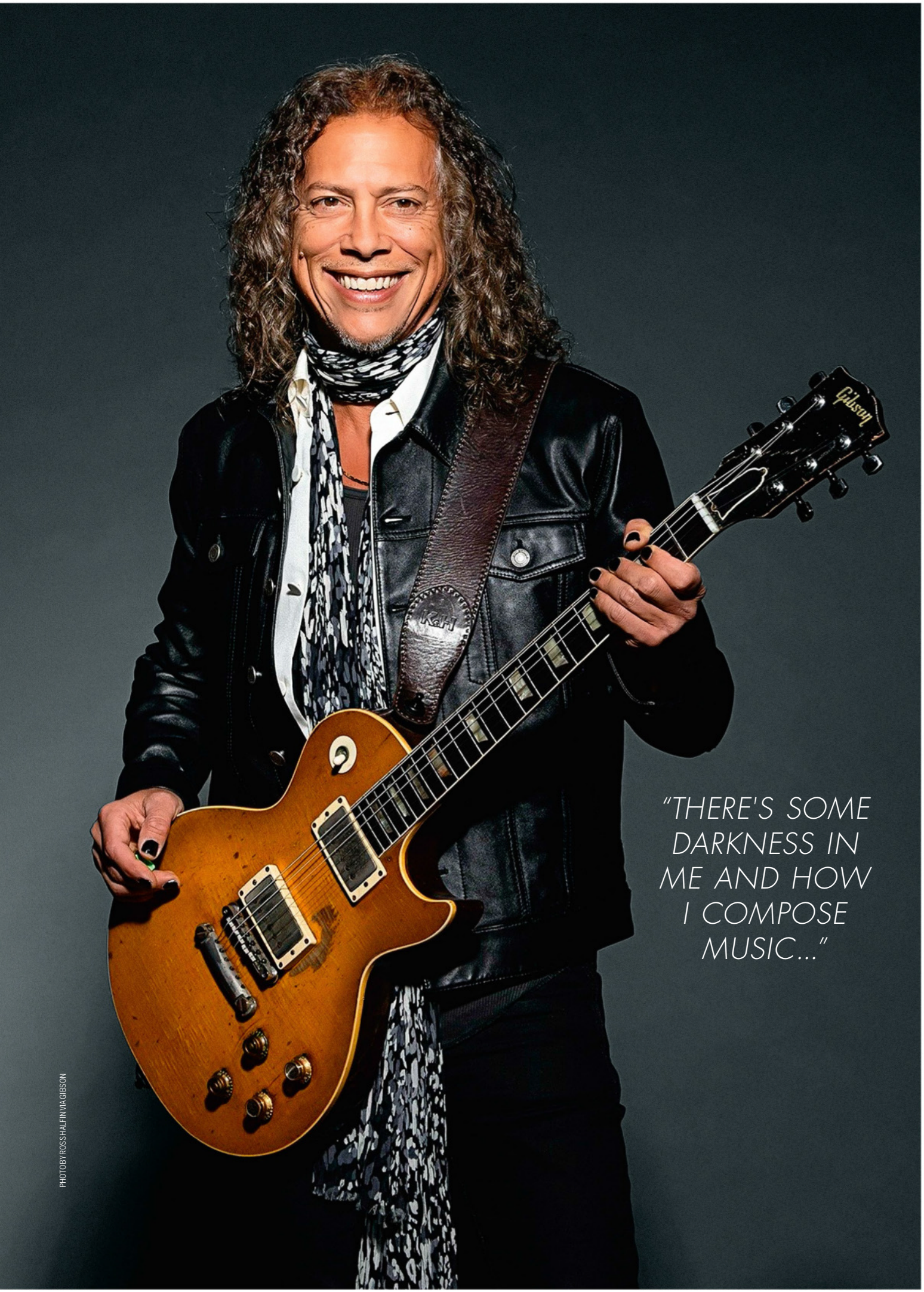
And though Metallica's juggernaut touring and recording schedule has clearly made extraordinary demands on the band's members, four decades of music-making has also left Hammett with enough room to reflect on and evolve his sound far more than some might credit. You might think, for example, that he still builds his sound primarily around active pickups. But, as our free-ranging conversation with the guitarist reveals, he's more likely to get his gain sounds with much older tech these days – PAFs mounted in a certain storied Les Paul formerly owned by Peter Green, of which he is the current owner and steward.

"There's so much Greeny on the new album," Hammett says. "I mean, when you hear a whammy bar, it's not Greeny [laughs]. But I really only played two guitars on this album. Some albums I played, like, 16 guitars on. But on this album, it's only two guitars: Greeny and my [ESP] Mummy guitar, that's all I needed.

"When I put Greeny on the rhythm pickup, and I hear that neck tone, it's just so much the neck tone that you want to hear," he says. "I mean, it just takes me... And the bridge pickup has so much bite and so much presence without being too trebly. It's amazing because when I jam with other people and listen to the recordings afterwards, Greeny just stands out, you know? Put three different guitars together and Greeny will just have more presence than any other guitar."

Kirk's conversion to a sound based on (an admittedly remarkable) vintage Les Paul has been a long road, however, and it began long before he took ownership of Greeny, as he explored how to evolve his playing and make it as fearless, direct and honest as possible.

We join him to talk about that journey, learn more about his feeling of connection to Green's music, and the burgeoning range of guitars inspired by Greeny that is now being built by Gibson – including the new USA model reviewed on page 62 and one we're not entirely sure we should know about yet...



"THERE'S SOME DARKNESS IN ME AND HOW I COMPOSE MUSIC..."

PHOTO BY ROSS HALFIN VIA GIBSON

How does Peter Green's music connect to your own musical world?
"Well, Peter Green's guitar style, even when he was improvising, every note was so perfectly played. He was a very, very thoughtful player... Every note counted with him – there were no throwaway notes and I love that about him. There's any number of guitar players out there who just kind of throw away notes. I have a whole fucking condominium full of throwaway notes, you know, but with him, there were hardly any.

"I love the way he wrote. *Oh Well – Oh Well I & II*... Ever listen to *Part II*? Fucking darker than the first part. I mean, *Part II* sounds like a funeral dirge, it sounds like the end of the fucking world. *Green Manalishi*... He wrote that sitting in his flat somewhere in London, right? It sounds like it was written in Mississippi in a shack on the edge of a swamp at two o'clock in the morning. That song is so dark without relying on elements to make sure it's dark, like heaviness or distorted guitar. Literally from the first E minor chord, 'Oh my God!' You're put in this place and when I hear that kind of playing, that kind of composition, instantly I go, 'Wow, his mental makeup must have been really something for this kind of music to come out.' Then I go to what he might have been experiencing and there's a darkness. And I can relate to that because there's some darkness in me, there's some darkness in how I compose music. I totally relate to Peter in those terms, absolutely."

Greeny was obviously a pillar of Green's sound – and now it's become a pillar of yours. How does that feel?
"It's never lost on me that it was Gary Moore's guitar and Peter Green's guitar – the guitar will not let me forget that. And so in the midst of playing it, I'll just get that impression and, all of a sudden, I'm playing a Peter Green lick or a Gary Moore lick... It's kind of spontaneous, you know. The thing with Greeny, it's a unique guitar. It's a blessed piece of wood, that's all I can really say – somehow it's blessed with an energy or vibration that's super unique. I've never really felt it in any other guitar."

You're often thought of as a player who's built their sound around active pickups. What's driven your move towards using Greeny with its PAFs?
"Well, old PAFs are so much more touch-sensitive and I've been trying to figure out for the last 10 years whether or not active pickups age well. Because it's a bunch of circuitry – but your traditional pickups, with [just] coils and magnets and wire, they have a tendency to age. That ageing factor really makes PAF pickups individual. Even the newer type of pickups, with traditional coils, magnets and wires, even those age [eventually] – like DiMarzio pickups. I put an old pair of DiMarzio pickups in a KH [Series S-style guitar], maybe it was an LTD, and I was amazed at how good it sounded to my amp setup. I thought to myself, 'Maybe the age of active pickups is over.'

"It's never lost on me that it was Gary Moore's guitar and Peter Green's guitar… It's a unique guitar, a blessed piece of wood"

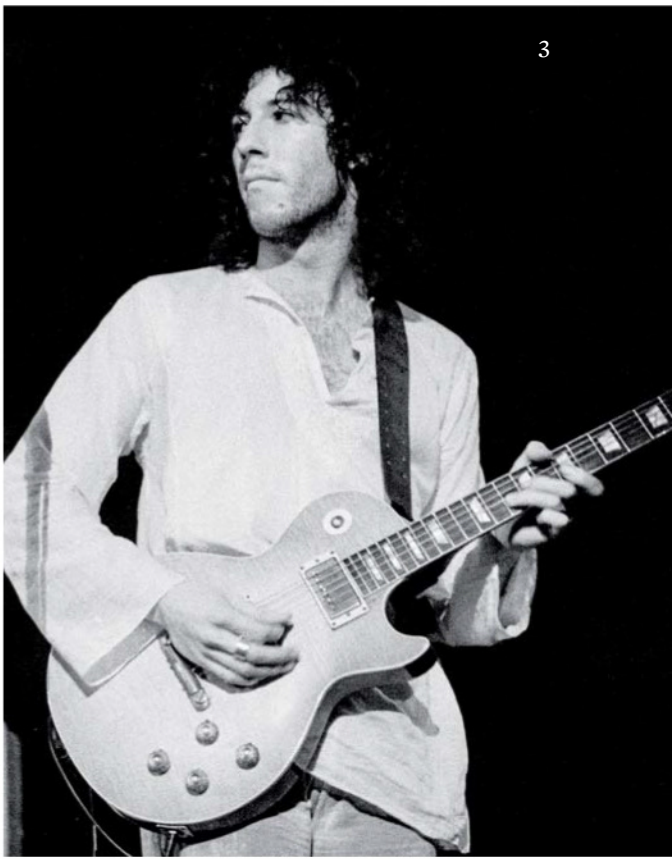
PHOTO BY LGI STOCK/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

1. Kirk's taste in guitars is wide ranging, but he started out with Strat-style electric guitars, later modded with active humbuckers. These were a necessary tool early in his career with the band, he says, as seen here in this shot from the early 80s

"I'll tell you what attracted me to active pickups in the 80s, it was the fact that they had a higher output – a battery-assisted higher output. They're basically less microphonic, higher output, which means lower noise. And that's what I needed back then for Metallica: we were all about distortion, being loud, high-gain... just a fucking wall of sound.

"But as I grew as a guitar player during the 90s, I started noticing PAF pickups. Man, that's the sound that I grew up hearing with all these British guitar players that I loved. Even Michael Schenker's Flying V had just stock Gibson pickups in it. Sometime in the 90s, I just realised that you can push a PAF pickup; you can take an amp and fully just gain it out. That PAF will just take it and take it. You really can't do that with a high-output active pickup: you turn up the gain and then you're lost *and* it's noisy. Then the [tonal] distinction's gone, the harmonic distortion changes, it's not as touch-sensitive – and you can get away with a lie, it covers up a lot of your mistakes.

"What I love about PAF pickups is the clarity of it: clarity of note, clarity in a succession of notes... the [nature of the] harmonic distortion protects sensitivity. And you can't really get



away with a lot. You have to play well and you have to play with clarity, you have to hit every note. Something like legato, it's easier with active pickups, not so much with PAFs. But when you do legato [licks] with PAFs, it sounds so much better to me.

"I still like that EMG active-pickup wall of sound and it works for our older material. But there was a shift in me about 15 or 20 years ago where I realised that PAF pickups, and stock pickups in general... I think you can push them way more than you can push EMGs and you could almost say I had it backwards. I should have started with just a regular pickup, pushing that and going, 'Okay, EMGs are the next level.' But no, I was, like, next-level first and then went to the more subtle thing – and I've discovered that the more subtle thing works for me. James [Hetfield] is the same way, he has the same opinion. He loves PAF pickups and thinks PAFs are great for lead – but, for him, the EMG active pickup sound is great for his rhythm sound and he really, really likes that rhythm sound."

You're often associated with 'SuperStrat' style electrics. How did your path to becoming a Les Paul player begin?

"When I first started playing guitar, I was listening a lot to Hendrix, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton. So I got a Strat. But when I got the Strat, plugged it in, it was clean; it wasn't full, it was that single-coil sound and it's like, 'Why doesn't this sound like Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix?' I realised it was the amp: the amp-pickup combination.

"Once I figured that out then I just needed a different type of guitar. I got a Flying V, and then I was good. But I always wanted a Les Paul. I'm looking at pictures of Jimmy Page where the Les Paul looks so amazing, and I would just stare at him. I'd look at Gary Moore's Les Paul – what a great guitar. I always wanted a Les Paul, but it didn't seem at the time to be the heavy metal [instrument] that I needed, which was a really fast guitar that was Strat-style, 24 frets, two humbuckers but with a whammy bar, active pickups... You weren't going to find a Les Paul like that. And that's what I wanted at the time to play all those early Metallica songs.

"But around, I would say, ...*And Justice For All* [1988] was when I actually started getting some disposable income and I bought a tiger-stripe Les Paul. I started playing it on stage and just loved it. I was in friggin' heaven... I broke the neck on that, got it back and all of a sudden, it sounded better. Then I was even more attached to it! And from then, not long after that I bought my first '59 Les Paul Standard in about 1990, it just all kicked in for me. I love Les Pauls. I love Strats. I love 'SuperStrats'. I love Teles, I love 335s, I love Flying Vs. And that's about it."

What do you plug Greeny into when you're at home? Hard to believe it's a high-gain stack...

"I have two of these Fenders [Kirk points to two Tweed Deluxe combos]. These Voxes are also amazing [he holds up what appears to be two small Nutube-based combos in front of his computer], and a new Carr amp. I'm basically plugging Greeny into anything that's around me because Greeny likes amps, and amps like Greeny. Greeny will make a shitty-sounding amp decent. It's just one of those guitars. There are amps out there that like guitars... I have an amp where you plug in just about any guitar and it sounds wonderful. Just like certain mics love voices – have you heard that phrase? Greeny is the guitar that loves amps and amps love Greeny.

2. The new Gibson USA Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' Les Paul Standard, reviewed on page 62, offers the famous out-of-phase sound that Kirk thinks of as 'Dragon Tone'

3. Peter Green may have given Greeny its name, but the guitar has seen many stages over the years in the hands of Gary Moore and, now, Kirk

PHOTO BY ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"No matter what the combination, Greeny always sounds interesting. Because it's in the wood, it's in the pickups – it's a complete package. All you need to do is a little tweak here and there on the amp and then you're good to go. Like I said, it's an amazing piece of wood and it's been played to hell. I mean, Peter Green played it a lot, Gary Moore really fucking played it to hell, and I play it to hell. And other people played it, too: Jimi Hendrix has played it, Rory Gallagher's played it, Jeff Beck, George Harrison. I mean, the list goes on and on and on..."

How does the feeling of playing the real Greeny translate to the various Custom Shop and now Gibson USA replicas of the guitar?

"I've realised the power that guitar has in terms of influence and inspiration. I am not elitist with that guitar and I'm not as protective as I should be. Because I think it really is the people's instrument and so I'll let anyone play that guitar – and when they play it, oh my God, their hands are shaking or they're just playing differently. So I thought, 'How can I share this with more people, outside of what I'm already doing?'

"That's what these Gibson reissues are doing now: it's to try to spread that inspiration, spread that influence, spread that mojo. I mean, you'll never have an exact Greeny copy because guitars are like human beings – so individualistic – but you can make a Greeny copy that looks like Greeny, feels like Greeny and 80 per cent sounds like Greeny. And when I say '80 per cent', the bridge pickup has to have that bark, that neck pickup has to have that beautiful tone that just draws you in. And then it has to have that out-of-phase sound in the centre, which I call the 'Dragon Tone'. To me, it sounds like a Strat through a 100-watt Marshall – and Les Pauls are not supposed to sound like that! But Greeny has that and I just love it.

"The first thing I check when I get these prototypes is the middle position to make sure it has that out-of-phase sound [correct]. I have to tell you, man, I've tried the Gibson Custom Shops. Those Greenys are great. Tom Murphy Greenys are really great. The Gibson USAs are great, but my favourite version of Greeny is probably the Epiphone... the Epiphone Greenys, just by themselves, sound great and play great, and I was amazed at how I was playing an Epiphone and I didn't want to put it down and it was delivering for me [Ed's note: at the time of writing, no Epiphone 'Greeny' has yet been announced officially, but Gibson's President Cesar Gueikian teased such a release recently, so time will tell]. It's just on all levels. This was two or three weeks ago. That Epiphone Greeny is now my couch guitar and I reach for it when I'm watching TV, like most guitar players are apt to do.

"I guess I'm most excited about that Epiphone because it makes the Greeny mythology, the Greeny influence, the Greeny inspiration available to everyone around the world who was motivated to get it.

"I've realised the power that guitar has in terms of influence and inspiration... That's what these reissues will do: spread that mojo"

PHOTO BY ROSS HALFIN VIA GIBSON

4. Greeny is no case queen these days – Kirk gigs with the guitar and says it's constantly by his side. It was used extensively on the new album, via Fractal Axe-Fx models of Kirk's Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier and Fortin Meathead amps

For me, it's a super-powerful thing because I might be helping some young musician get a Greeny in their hands to play heavy blues like Peter Green or Gary Moore or come up with a song like *Oh Well* or *Albatross* or something. Or maybe they're just a Metallica fan, but then they come up with some weird, crazy, heavy metal/blues hybrid that no-one else has ever heard before. Maybe it's because of Greeny. I don't know.

"The main thing is the power of influence and power of inspiration. To me, it leads to the music of 20 years from now. So maybe it's just an investment – in the hope that someone will take [a Greeny replica] and make great music that we can all enjoy in the end. Those are my intentions. It's not fucking status. It's not finances. It's not to see my name out there. My motivation is mainly musical and to go out there and put guitars in the hands of musicians who will make music that hopefully I will like in 10 or 15 years' time."

Metallica's new album, *72 Seasons*, is out now on Blackened Recordings **www.metallica.com**

TRUE GRIT

dod.com

SHAKE YOUR MONEYMAKER

Following a pair of five-figure Custom versions, here's the everyman Greeny. But is it a valid introduction or simply a slightly pimped version of an existing Les Paul?

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

Few guitars come with such a historic and evocative backstory as this one. Pretty much whatever your age or taste in music, at least one if not all of the players involved – Peter Green, Gary Moore and Kirk Hammett, oh, and let's not forget Les Paul himself – will be on your playlist. The appeal, the blanket publicity and the social media buzz mean that this guitar is a more than significant introduction. But what do we actually get for £3k?

It seems like a modded Les Paul Standard '50s, the cornerstone of the Original Series, which has remained unchanged since its introduction, under new ownership, in late 2019. But thanks to its satin nitro finish, it's actually based on the Faded version that appeared last year.

As for the pimps to its starting point, first off, we get a maple top upgrade from AA to AAA. Then, reflecting the neck repairs of the original Greeny model, the headstock is left plain with no 'Les Paul Model' script or any truss rod cover ID. The toggle switch ring is left plain, too, and the control knobs differ, a Gary Moore mod we believe: the bridge pickup's pair has the gold top-hat knobs with silver reflectors of the current '60s models, while the neck pickup has the standard gold top-hat knobs of the '50s Standards.

The Greeny Burst finish is a slightly deeper-hued version of the Faded's Vintage Honey Burst and is applied just to the top; the rest is a mid-brown stain over the slightly open-pore feel of the lighter coloured mahogany. We also get Grover Rotomatic tuners with 'contemporary' Schaller-like knobs, not the vintage Kluson style of the current '50s guitars.

Onto pickups and the spec of the Custom Shop Greeny tells us it uses "Custom Greeny Buckers with Alnico II magnets", while the USA model's spec just calls them "Greenybuckers". On both, the bar magnet of the neck pickup is flipped, its polarity reversed, so when both pickups are on together they're out of phase. Also, the neck pickup is physically reversed so the screw poles face the bridge, which really shouldn't make too much of a difference, even if the pickup coils are slightly unmatched like the Burstbuckers, for example – and these appear to be wax-potted.

Although the neck pickup is reversed, it's the magnet-flip that puts it out of phase with the bridge and creates *that* sound

A small change to Greeny compared with the 50s Faded model are these Grover Rotomatic tuners with 'contemporary' buttons

This guitar is raw power personified, and that out-of-phase middle position provides another texture
VOX
ORANGE

UNDER THE HOOD

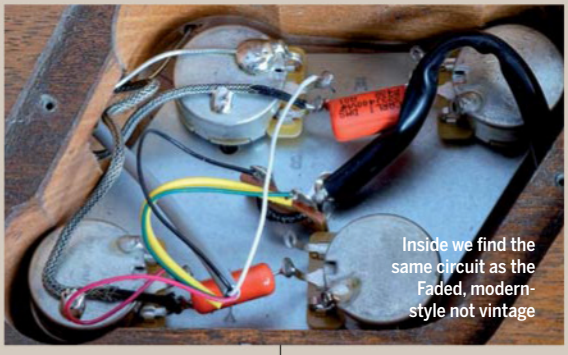
What's inside and what's going on with those Greenybuckers?

Under the backplate, just like the 50s Faded model, we see Gibson logo'd 500k pots (by CTS) and 022µF (223J) Orange Drop caps, wired modern style. The components are mounted on a metal grounding plate, but the cavity/cover isn't otherwise screened. The DCRs of the Greenybuckers are 8.15kohms (neck) and 8.53k (bridge), not a million miles away from the Burstbucker 2 and 3 we recently measured at 8k and 8.43k respectively.

However, we did get some more info from Gibson USA: "The Greenybucker pickups we designed here were approved by Kirk [Hammett] as the descriptions say on the websites. All Greenybucker sets we make will be the same winding specs, magnets, etc. The differences you will see, though, is the Custom Shop version has aged nickel covers and screws [and] the Custom Shop pickups are unpotted. USA-manufactured guitars will have potted new, shiny nickel hardware but the same specs otherwise. The pickups are wound with 42 enamel magnet wire, use unpolished A-2 magnets, [and] the rhythm pickup has the magnet flipped to have the out-of-phase sound in the middle position."

We hope Gibson will make the Greenybuckers available in its Pickup Shop, but quite a few pickup makers offer sets aimed to nail *that* sound, including Bare Knuckle, Monty's, Seymour Duncan and ThroBak, for starters.

Exactly how Peter Green's 'Burst ended up with its out-of-phase pickups is the subject of much conjecture. Some believe the magnet flip was a mistake in the original manufacturing; others believe it was the result of a botched repair of its neck pickup, circa 1967, by the near mythical London guitar repairer Sam Li. Another tale to enhance the fabled 1959 Gibson Les Paul known as Greeny.



Inside we find the same circuit as the Faded, modern-style not vintage

Feel & Sounds

Our advice is to forget the backstory and just enjoy the guitar. It's a cracker. There's no weight relief and the guitar weighs a good-for-the-style 4kg (8.8lbs), just slightly heavier than the previous Faded 50s we reviewed. The neck is very slightly narrower than that 50s Faded, too: 42.3mm at the nut and 52.4mm by the 12th but identical in depth, with a 1st fret measurement of 22mm and 24.8mm by the 12th. The shape is a pretty classic C, although this one actually feels very subtly asymmetrical with slightly less shoulder on the treble side.

As before, though, there are a lot of sharp edges, especially to the top edge of the body binding, and you can feel a slight line on the edge of the neck where it meets the binding, the same on the body. It's not a dealbreaker, but it does give a rather unfinished feel to a £3k guitar – and with everything else being so ship-shape, we can't help but ask why?

Plugged in, Greeny is noticeably hotter than our reference Les Paul Classic with its retrofitted Burstbucker 1 and 2 – a little thicker, creamier, less polite. With both volumes full up, it sounds more Gary Moore than Peter Green, and when we select both pickups the sound drops in volume with its expected out-of-phase nasally, thinner voice. However, reducing either of the volumes a little creates a slightly out-of-phase sound that's a lot more useful for most: fuller but still with a little honk. Unlike the current Les Paul Classic, which has a pull-switch to engage a conventional out-of-phase sound if you want it, the magnet flip here means you don't have a choice.

Verdict

Is this USA Greeny a good Les Paul? Yes, and it's one that would've been just as good copping Slash or the Pistols' Steve Jones as it is with more nuanced styles of Mr Green. It's raw power personified, and while you are stuck with that out-of-phase middle position, it provides another texture that might prove as useful tracking parts on a recording as chasing Greeny's tone.

GIBSON KIRK HAMMETT 'GREENY' LES PAUL STANDARD

PRICE: £2,999 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: 2-piece mahogany with carved AAA figured maple top
NECK: 1-piece mahogany, '50s Vintage profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.6")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/42.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Single-bound rosewood, acrylic trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Grover Rotomatic tuners w/ contemporary buttons – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: Covered Gibson Greenybucker w/ reversed magnet polarity (neck) and Greenybucker (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.01/8.8
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The Gibson Custom Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' 1959 Les Paul Standard costs £18,699. The USA Les Paul Standard 50s Faded costs £2,299; the glossed version that includes Goldtop, Figured and Plain tops, with and without P-90s, is priced from £2,799
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Greeny Burst (as reviewed) – satin nitrocellulose

Gibson
www.gibson.com

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Workhorse Les Paul vibe with thin satin finish; crisp, clean build; good weight; powerful PAF voice with musical out-of-phase sounds, especially if you use your volume controls

CONS The magnet flip means you can't put the pickups in phase; sharp binding edges; quite an uplift in price from the standard Faded model

Guitarist
CHOICE
Seymour Duncan
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Peter Green's 1931 National Duolian is a thing of weathered beauty and plays well to this day

LOVE THAT BURNS

The late blues hero Peter Green was not only one of the most influential guitarists in history but he had a wide-ranging taste in instruments. With over 100 of his guitars coming up for auction, we examine some of the gems from his personal collection alongside restoration expert Steve Clarke – and discover some surprisingly affordable guitars going under the hammer, too

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis

When the guitar collection of a legendary guitarist goes on sale, it's normally dominated by guitars that garner record sums. From electrics that were used on platinum-selling albums to vintage unobtainium, such auctions are generally composed of instruments that average guitarists can only dream of – partly because of their provenance and partly because rockstars tend to own vertiginously high-end equipment.

The late Peter Green's guitar collection is a more interesting proposition, however. Though it contains many highly sought-after instruments, it also reflects the tastes of a man who maintained a broad and unpretentious interest in guitars throughout his life. Some were played daily, while others were bought seemingly on a whim to form a collection of well over 100 instruments that includes many rare vintage guitars but also workaday modern instruments, from Strat clones to seaweed-hued semis. Turkish lutes and bulky archtops sit cheek by jowl with high-end British acoustics and chainstore electrics – a huge spectrum of sounds to suit a broad and enquiring musical mind.

Now, three years after Peter's passing, his guitar collection is coming up for sale at prestigious London auction house Bonhams, along with some of Peter's self-penned artworks and Fleetwood Mac grails such as the original hand-written lyrics to *Man Of The World*. The auction, which will be online only, will take place from 16 to 28 June. But with so many guitars going under the hammer, it's clear

someone must have had a heck of a job authenticating, cataloguing and prepping everything in time for the sale. That someone is Steve Clarke, a veteran guitar tech and restoration expert who is also the author of the *Famous Frets* book, which forensically traces the history of some of rock's most iconic guitars. Today, Steve is Bonhams' go-to man for high-profile guitar sales of this kind and he was happy to tell us a little more about the many interesting instruments that ended up on his workbench while he was preparing Peter Green's guitars for auction.

One of the most exciting is the 1931 National Duolian that Peter was photographed with around the time of his 1997 *Peter Green Splinter Group* album. Imbued with shovelfuls of mojo and evidently played hard for decades, the guitar embodies so much blues history, not least Peter's own contributions. So what did Steve think of what must surely be the centrepiece guitar of the sale?

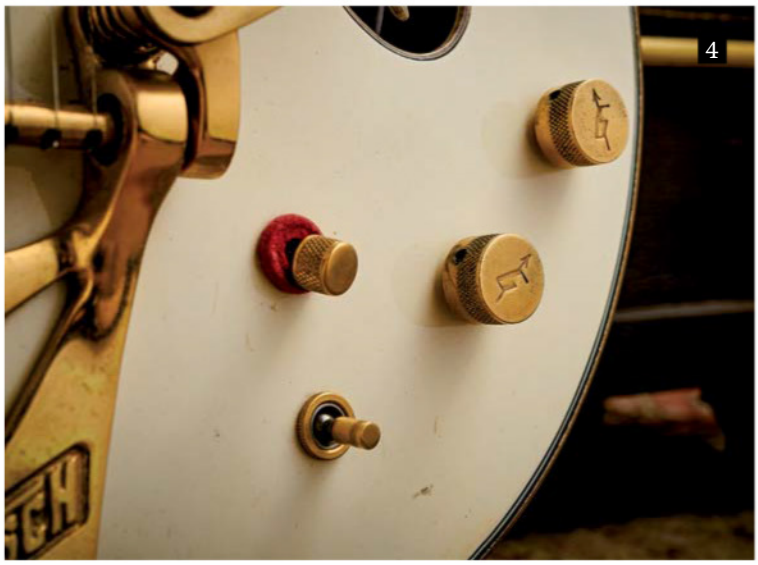
"[The National Duolian is] bloody loud! It's a shock… I didn't know where the sound was coming from – and that's on old strings"

"It's bloody loud!" Steve laughs. "You strum a chord and it's a shock, to be honest with you. I've played these before, but I didn't know where the sound was coming from – and that's with old strings. And it was loud. Someone next to me said, 'Have you plugged that in?' I said, 'I was just going to ask you that! Where's this volume coming from?' It doesn't sound real. It's quite heavy, though – it surprised me – and it's got a very wide fingerboard on it."

Like so many National guitars, wear-marks have only increased its charisma, while the familiar Pacific-island scenes on the back of the body still beguile the eye.

"It's beautiful," Steve agrees. "It's got nice engraving – I think it's one with the palm trees on the back. So it's a lovely, lovely thing."

However, beneath the evocative



1. The hallmark Gretsch 'thumbnail' fret markers are just one detail on Peter's stunning '68 Falcon

2. Patinated gold appointments on the Falcon hint that this was one of the guitars that needed extra TLC from Steve Clarke

3. By 1968, White Falcons boasted an array of features including string mutes, which can need care over time

4. Knobs and switches on the Gretsch needed extra attention and some were non-functional at first

"[The Gretsch] was in a poor state. When I plugged it in nothing happened… Nothing! Completely dead"

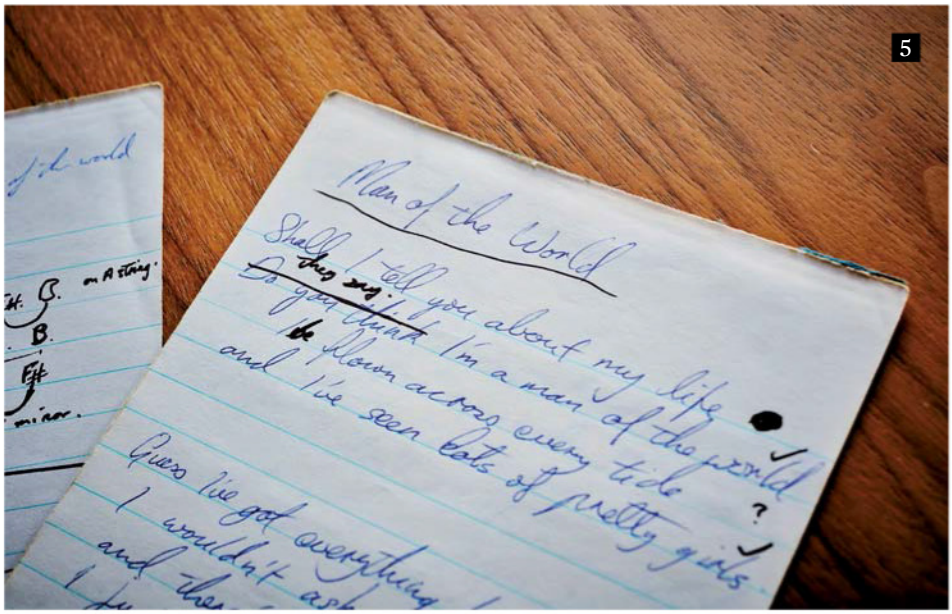
Phoenix rising: Peter Green's stunning 1968 White Falcon

looks, there was still a guitar that Steve needed to set up and perform cautious, sympathetic maintenance on before it could be presented for sale.

"It was a little bit untidy," he recalls. "I slacked the strings off – which had to be kept on – because the fingerboard was so dry. The frets were also a little bit bronzed-over due to storage. So I oiled the fingerboard and cleaned all the frets with these fret rubbers, which you probably know about – they come in three gauges – and got a really nice shine on them. The fingerboard looked fantastic when I'd done it. I then put the strings back on and just carefully tuned it up, because they were quite old strings, and I'd gotten rid of that scratchiness. You know that feeling you get when a guitar's not been played for a while? But after that it was great. It's just a wonderful guitar, impressive," he says, adding that the way he found Peter's guitars set up shone an interesting light on his preferences as a player.

"The main thing I'd say on all of the guitars in his collection, which really surprised me, was how high the action was," Steve continues. "They were all very high action. He obviously wanted to dig in. Where he did seem to have had setup work done was in the nut area: the nuts of some of his guitars were cut to [give a relatively low action] around those first three frets. But higher up the fretboard, he didn't want a low action. There was a Gibson Firebird I looked at and an Epiphone Explorer that, again, both had really high actions."

"There was a crumpled up [sheet of] paper [with] lyrics to 'Man Of The World', which is estimated to be worth around £80,000"



5. This humble sheet of notepaper contains the original lyrics to *Man Of The World* and is one of the star lots in the auction

6. A doodled self-portrait reveals Peter Green's sense of humour and flair with pen and ink that went beyond penning lyrics

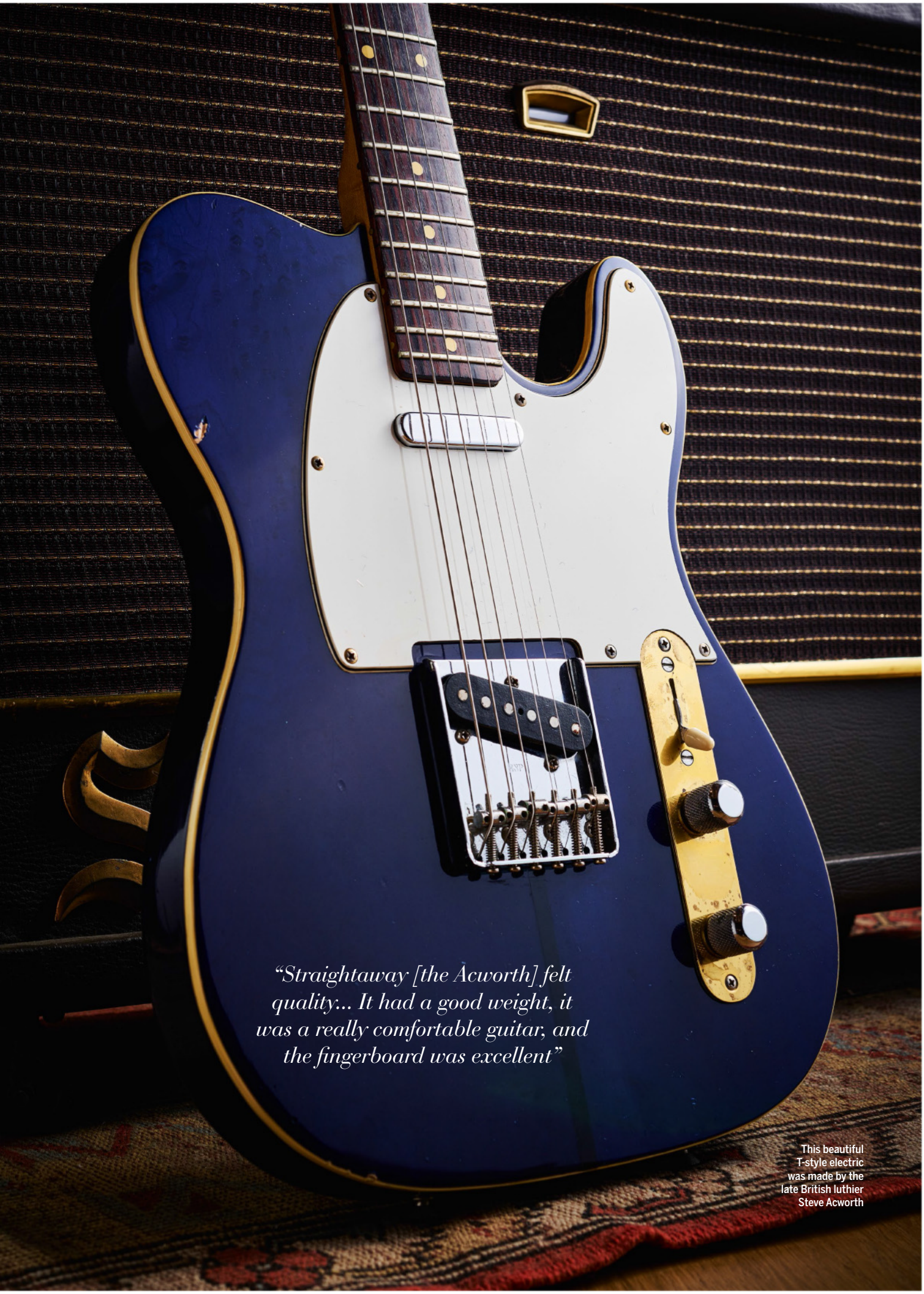
Careful With That Axe

Some guitars in the collection needed more than just a bit of light fettling, meaning Steve had to tread carefully to keep the guitar as close to its original condition while ensuring it worked and played properly before entering the auction catalogue. Such was the case with the beautiful 1968 Gretsch White Falcon that is another standout instrument in the sale.

"It was in a poor state, that one," Steve admits. "It was probably one of the worst ones out of the six that we needed for the Birmingham Guitar Show [where the auction was showcased to admiring guitar fans in February of this year]. When I plugged in the Gretsch nothing happened... Nothing! Completely dead. I thought, 'Here we go...' And time was so precious, I can't tell you. It was just bonkers. So I said, 'What do you want done?' And they said, 'Steve, we need those six guitars and they've got to be working.' So I said, 'Right, I'm gonna need to spend some time on it...'

"I basically started messing about. I checked the jack socket and it had completely bronzed over – there was nothing going on there. Cleaned all that up, went through all the switching. One of the toggle switches, I recall, had turned around [in its mounting] and it was shorting out. So I took that out and checked it, undid the knot on the wires, and 'Brang!' a bit of life came back into it. And then it was a matter of cleaning the pots, which were terribly scratchy and intermittent.

"I spent quite a while on that one guitar and Bonhams are staring at me like, 'You do know there's about 150 other guitars [to set up]



"Straightaway [the Acworth] felt quality... It had a good weight, it was a really comfortable guitar, and the fingerboard was excellent"

This beautiful T-style electric was made by the late British luthier Steve Acworth

and we've got two days, don't you?' [laughs] But I got it working and oiled the fingerboard and it was lovely. It was just such a nice guitar, just a wonderful piece of history and everything."

Unlike with normal maintenance jobs, however, Steve had to seek clearance before making any change to the original condition of the guitars he inspected, no matter how routine.

"Sometimes we'd have to phone the estate if I was just taking strings off," he explains. "If a string was found to be broken when we inspected a guitar, it had to go back in case after it was replaced. Whereas you or I would probably just chuck it in the bin."

"He had Encore Strat-style guitars... Some of these things he got just because he liked the colour"

One notable feature of the collection is the number of rarely seen models by major US makers. Peter clearly had an eye for uncommon guitars, such as an early 70s ES-325 with mini-humbuckers, which looks like the lovechild of a 335 and an Epiphone Riviera, with a dash of 70s SG thrown in for good measure.

"They're unusual," Steve agreed. "From memory, I think that was a 1972 model. It had the embossed [pickup] covers on it, which I think nails it to around '72. And I remember now the bridge pickup surround was busted, so what had happened is that the adjustment screw on the bass side was tilting and going into the guitar body. But yeah, it was a '72 with the Epiphone-type pickups on it. It was a lovely thing, though. I got that working, too. It also had a fault on the volume pot for the bridge pickup, which didn't surprise me, it'd probably been like that for a bit. But yes, got it working again – nice guitar and you'll not see many of those."

WHEN KIRK MET PETER

Metallica's Kirk Hammett recalls the day he met Peter Green, discovering that a Strat could still put a spring in the bluesman's stride

"You know, when I spent that day with Peter Green, I found out that he was an active guitar player and... I think the story that everyone got was that he just sat around doing whatever he did – fishing or whatever. But after seeing him, I got the impression that he was a lot more connected to the guitar than people realised and he was a lot more of a daily player than people realised, too. There was a guy there, who was one of his best friends. And he was telling me that Peter had just gotten a guitar like two weeks ago, a Strat or something like that and he was just so happy about it. And I thought, 'Wow, that's great.' You know, he's still got that hunger, that need in him to play. Because I guess a lot of people think that he just walked away from music, and maybe he did. But at some point he came back to it and his heart was still in it, I'd like to think."

PHOTO BY HARRY HERD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

7. Peter using the Gibson Howard Roberts Fusion III (pictured opposite) during his 90s return to the live stage. The guitar is one of the lots going under the hammer in June

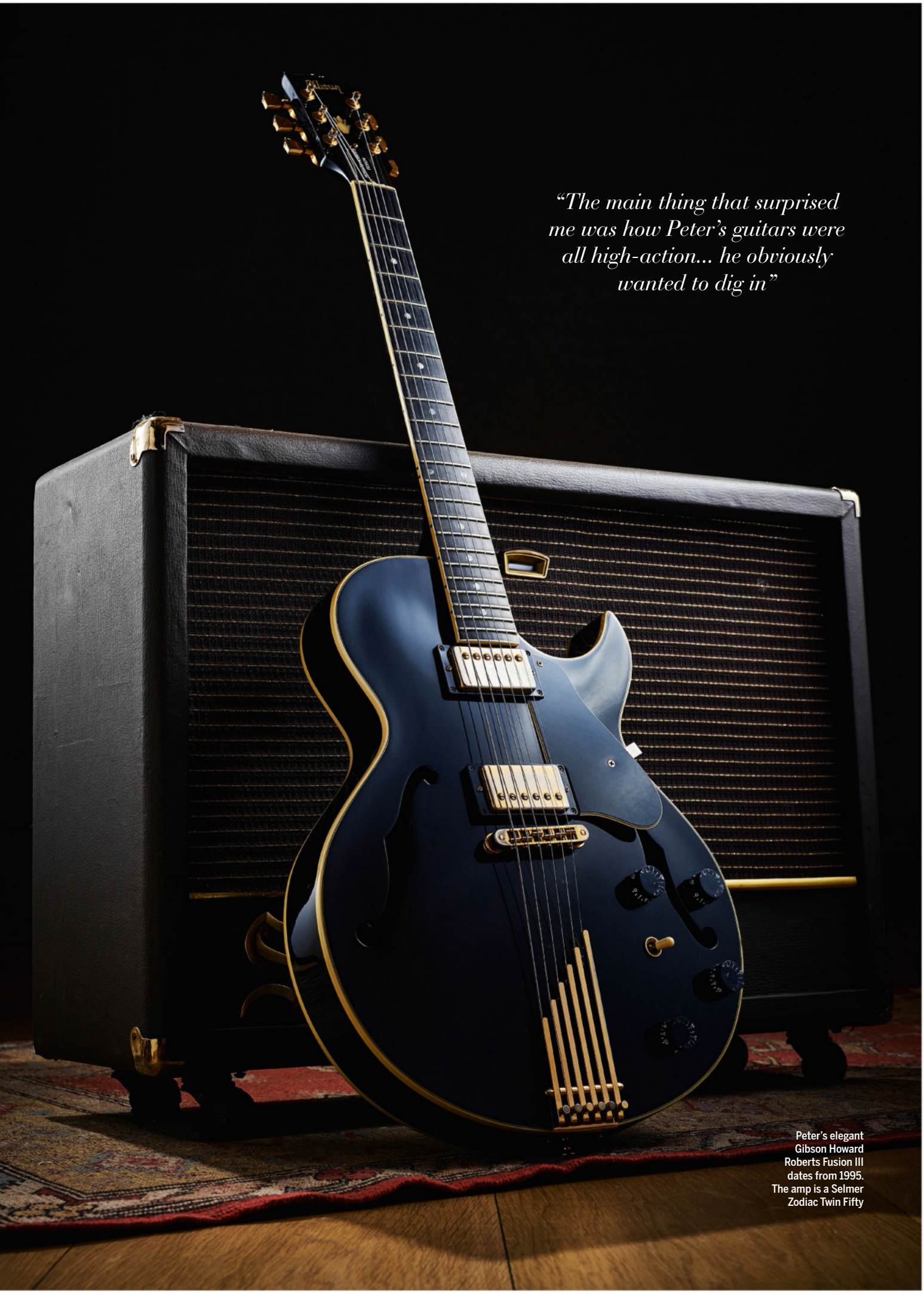
The Colour & The Shape

But, arguably, what makes this auction a little different to others of its kind is the number of inexpensive but serviceable guitars that offer Peter Green fans a very realistic chance to bid on something he owned and enjoyed.

"He had Encore Strat-style guitars, you know, and Stagg stuff," Steve explains. "And some of these things he'd got, I think, perhaps just because he liked the colour. I remember one that was a green Tanglewood, with a 335-type shape. I think the story was he bought it in Scandinavia. There's a piece of paper inside: 'Bought this in Sweden,' I think it said, and the weird thing is, he bought it because it 'reminded him of seaweed'."

"That also seems to be the case with things like his four-string Turkish lute," Steve continues. "According to people who were close to him, he sometimes bought things if he simply liked the look of them. He didn't necessarily play them all. And there were many guitars that clearly he hadn't played. A lot of the Strats, he played, though – I could tell he played them [regularly]. He also had a nice Telecaster-style electric, a blue one made by Steve Acworth."

Indeed, that particular guitar (pictured on page 71) immediately stood out to us as well. Made by the late British luthier Steve Acworth, who died in 2017, the guitar closely resembles Leo's finest with a few departures from tradition including a zero fret. Somehow the carefully hand-built nature of the guitar speaks to you straight out of the case, Steve agrees.



"The main thing that surprised me was how Peter's guitars were all high-action... he obviously wanted to dig in"

Peter's elegant Gibson Howard Roberts Fusion III dates from 1995. The amp is a Selmer Zodiac Twin Fifty

"Straightaway it felt *quality*," he says. "It had a good weight to it and it was a really comfortable guitar, really nicely balanced and the fingerboard was excellent. And from memory, it had the lowest action of all the guitars I picked up. It was like it was somebody else's [other than Peter's], if you know what I mean? It has a very low action on it, very playable and it didn't choke out anywhere; the nut was cut perfectly on it. Beautiful guitar, really, really nice colour. I loved it, absolutely loved it," Steve enthuses and we can only agree. In fact, the Acworth T-style electric would be the guitar we'd be most tempted to take a punt on were we bidding in June.

Some of the most exciting lots in the auction, from a musical perspective, aren't instruments at all, however. Steve says that among the guitars were numerous vinyl records as well as sketches and artworks plus, most interestingly of all, hand-written lyrics to seminal Fleetwood Mac songs.

"If he could pick up a guitar and play it and it felt good for him, he was happy – never mind [its price]"

"There were boxes with albums in, you know, like K-Tel greatest hits and Fleetwood Mac albums and things," Steve says. "There was a whole range of very strange stuff and classical stuff. Then in one of the boxes there were some very abstract-looking paintings and a crumpled up [sheet of] paper. Someone told me that those were the lyrics to *Man Of The World*, which are now estimated to be worth around £80,000."

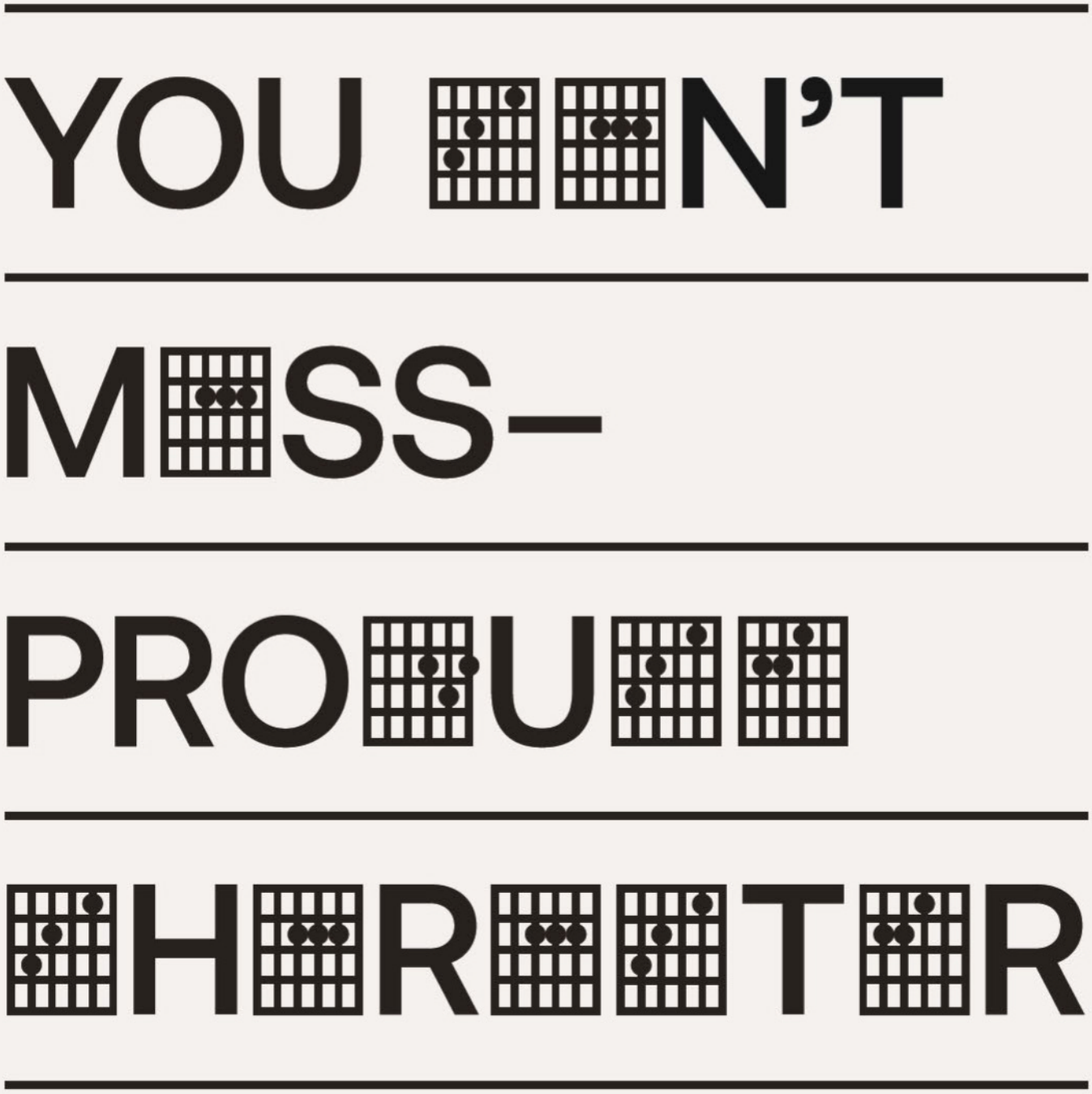
But it's the guitars, of course, that are most likely to capture the attention of readers of this magazine. Eclectic, interesting, surprising yet at times quite humble, Peter Green's collection is more than just a group of instruments, it's also a window on the mind and musical life of an enigmatic artist.

"Think about guys like Hank Marvin – you could give him a Strat copy from Argos for £100 and he'd still sound like Hank Marvin, you know what I mean?" Steve Clarke reflects. "And I think that's the same with Peter Green: he must have known that if he could pick a guitar up and play it and everything else felt good for him, and if he liked the look of it, he was happy – never mind if it's 50 quid or five grand." G

For more information on the auction, see www.bonhams.com/auction/28859/the-peter-green-collection. To learn more about Steve Clarke's wider work, see www.famousfrets.com

8. Steve Clarke says Peter's Strats showed the most evidence of regular playing. This 1999 Fender Custom Shop Relic example needed some truss-rod adjustment but is now playing just right

9. This 1972 Gibson ES-325 TD is a rare model and sports Epiphone-style mini-humbuckers



GUITARISTS GET IT.

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PIONEERS

Sister Rosetta Tharpe

The evolutionary timeline of rock history includes iconic names such as T-Bone Walker, Chuck Berry, Elvis, Little Richard and many others – and yet it's only in recent years that another name has started to get its due. The extraordinary Sister Rosetta Tharpe not only paved the way for rock 'n' roll but also stands tall as an electric guitar pioneer

Words Denny Ilett

Rosetta Nubin was born on 20 March 1915 in Cotton Plant, Arkansas, a small town sandwiched between the Midwestern and Southern states. Both parents were cotton workers, although Rosetta didn't know much of her father except that he sang in his spare time. Her mother, Katie, was deeply ensconced in the local church as both deaconess, vocalist and mandolinist.

Clearly a child prodigy, by the age of six Rosetta was performing with her mother, singing and playing guitar under the name Little Rosetta Nubin as part of a travelling evangelical group. Even at this early stage Rosetta was spoken of as a formidable talent on the guitar. Throughout the 1920s, she further honed her skills after relocating with her mother to Chicago, performing in gospel music ensembles locally alongside the occasional nationwide tour.

It was around this time that Rosetta started to hear the first recordings of such blues queens as Ma Rainey and the trio of Smiths – Bessie, Trixie and Mamie. This was the era when blues was dominated by female artists shortly before the first Delta, or country blues, recordings were made. Rosetta was right in the thick of it, absorbing the music of her church roots and mixing in a dose of the blues – a controversial pursuit at the time.

In 1934, aged just 19, Rosetta married for the first time. His name was Thomas Thorpe, a preacher who was part of the touring troupe that Rosetta and Katie were involved with. The marriage lasted just four years, but in that time Rosetta Nubin became Sister Rosetta Tharpe, a slight deviation from her husband's name.

Decca Daze

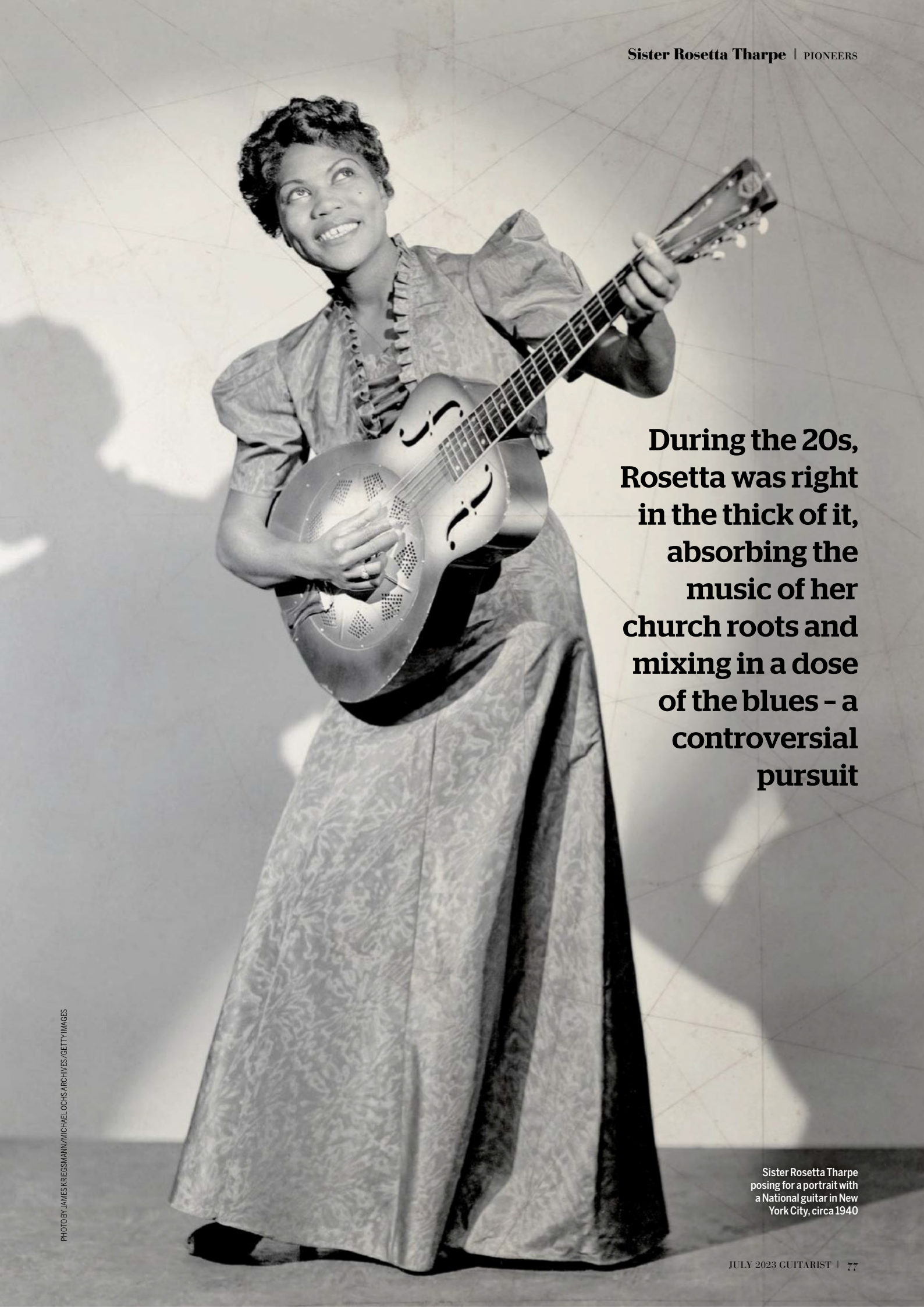
Big Band leader Lucky Millinder led an orchestra from the mid-1920s to the mid-50s that served as a breeding ground for many future stars of jazz and blues. Bull Moose Jackson, Wynonie Harris and Ruth Brown were among those who later found fame as R&B took hold into the 1940s.

Tharpe joined Millinder's orchestra for her first recordings at the end of October 1938 waxing four sides for Decca. *That's All* and *My Man And I* feature just Tharpe's voice and Delta-infused National guitar (like the guitar pictured, right). Sounding for all the world like a female Robert Johnson, Rosetta's sparkling voice soared over her accompaniment, demonstrating her mastery of the country blues style perfectly. *The Lonesome Road* – an evergreen jazz standard with a gospel-leaning lyric later recorded by the likes of Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole – sees Rosetta performing solely as vocalist, her church-influenced yet blues-drenched voice perfect for this material.

It's with *Rock Me*, however, that we hear Tharpe's electric guitar for the first time and, significantly, this is the very record that had such a profound influence on future rock 'n' rollers such as Elvis, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis. It's a typical 16-bar blues sequence, for the time, where Rosetta's now patent bluesy-gospel vocal blends effortlessly with Millinder's standard swing-era big band arrangement. But it's the opening 16-bar guitar solo that caused such a stir and is nothing short of revolutionary.

Big Bill Broonzy's *It's A Low Down Dirty Shame* featured the first electric guitar sounds on a blues recording courtesy of the legendary George Barnes and was recorded

ARTWORK BY CESCO19/GETTYIMAGES



During the 20s, Rosetta was right in the thick of it, absorbing the music of her church roots and mixing in a dose of the blues – a controversial pursuit

PHOTO BY JAMES KRIEGSMANN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Sister Rosetta Tharpe posing for a portrait with a National guitar in New York City, circa 1940

a mere seven months before Tharpe's *Rock Me* solo. In turn, both recordings are almost a year before the first records by Charlie Christian were issued.

Sister Rosetta truly was a force and highly influential in the electric guitar's early days, a fact so often overlooked. It's a beautifully melodic solo full of subtle slides and string bends, and sounds as though it's taken as much from country music as it has blues. The song was a huge hit and made Rosetta a star despite the controversy surrounding the recording, which, effectively, is a gospel song performed in a secular style. It was a full 16 years before Ray Charles got the credit for mixing sacred with secular with his seminal *I Got A Woman* record from 1955. But it was Rosetta who was the true pioneer.

Breaking Ground

A stream of historically important recordings followed. *This Train*, *Trouble In Mind*, *Shout Sister Shout*, *Nobody's Fault But Mine* and *Strange Things Happening Every Day*, her biggest hit, are just some of her recordings that are now acknowledged as groundbreaking and influential in those proto-rock 'n' roll days. On these, and many other finely crafted records throughout the 1940s, Tharpe plays acoustically in a classic Delta style – each track allowing her guitar and voice to soar.

Rosetta also made several traditional gospel records in tandem with her more R&B-flavoured output, a clear sign that she felt some degree of guilt over becoming so well known as a secular pop star. After all, gospel was where her heart and musical roots lay. Regardless, she maintained this musical balancing act for the remainder of her career by which time it had become perfectly acceptable to combine the two.

As the 50s dawned, Tharpe, like so many of her trailblazing contemporaries, found her career on somewhat of a downturn as a new generation appeared and proceeded to convert her innovations into rock 'n' roll. Similarly, on the gospel scene, the rise of Mahalia Jackson had a similar effect in making Rosetta sound old-fashioned, almost overnight. Tharpe continued to perform in nightclubs and on tour, but the hit records had dried up.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe's 1940s recordings are now acknowledged as groundbreaking and influential in those proto-rock 'n' roll days

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Rosetta controversially bridged the gap between gospel and secular music with *Rock Me* in the late 1930s

PHOTO BY CHRIS WARE/KEYSTONE FEATURES/GETTY IMAGES

Crossing The Pond

By 1957, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Elvis Presley and a host of others had firmly established rock 'n' roll as the music of choice for 'the kids'. In the UK, however, something else was going on in parallel with the new music emanating from across the pond: a vibrant and healthy scene for traditional jazz. One of its leading lights was trombonist Chris Barber who had led a band that included Lonnie Donegan since the late 40s. During Barber's concerts, Donegan would play what became known as a 'skiffle break' where he'd perform songs by the likes of Woody Guthrie and Lead Belly. These interval sets kicked off a whole movement in British music that directly led to the 'blues boom' of the 1960s.

Aside from this, Barber took it upon himself to bring over many blues and jazz musicians from the States to perform with his band, therefore introducing UK and European audiences to heroes that had only been heard on record before. It was tours featuring the likes of Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, Muddy Waters and, in 1957, Sister Rosetta Tharpe that has such a profound impact on young British musicians that are now household names such as Peter Green, Paul McCartney, Eric Clapton, Keith Richards, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck. The list is endless – and the rest is history!

The 1957 tour was a huge success and put Rosetta firmly back on top. She came to the UK again in 1958 and in 1964 she toured as part of the Blues & Gospel Caravan, which also featured Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Rev Gary Davis and Mississippi John Hurt.

Going Electric

It's from the late 50s through the 60s that we are blessed with some incredible live footage of Rosetta singing and playing. By this time, she'd gone fully electric and was playing the guitar with a ferocity that foreshadows Townshend, Clapton, Beck, Page and Hendrix. Her signature licks are full of clever use of chromatics, doublestops and triplets, all delivered with such ease. They're fluid and melodic with a rhythmic drive that can only be described as being 'in the pocket'. Her sound and approach was quite unlike the bulk of blues guitarists at the time and actually allow one to see the beginnings of the path the music was to take as it strived to see itself beyond the pentatonic box.

Tharpe favoured a thumbpick for single lines and rhythm, freeing up her other fingers to pick out those Delta licks at which she was also a master. She played through Gibson amps in her early electric days, simply because they were the only ones available, and had no problem turning

Performing with a Gibson Les Paul Goldtop with trapeze tailpiece in 1957

Sister Rosetta Tharpe with her iconic white Gibson SG while filming at Wilbraham Road station in Manchester, May 1964

PHOTO BY TV TIMES/TV TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

them up full! In fact, Rosetta is often cited as one of the first guitarists to fully embrace valve overdrive. In later footage, Tharpe is plugged into either a 15-watt Gibson Falcon or a Vox AC30. She used 'Vestapol' tuning in D; imagine the notes of an open E chord tuned down a whole step to D A D F# A D.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe's guitar collection is enough to make any vintage enthusiast salivate. In the early days she played a National Triolian Resonator, a wooden-bodied (as opposed to the later steel) guitar produced between 1938 and 1941, with it

By the late 50s Rosetta had gone fully electric and was playing the guitar with a ferocity that foreshadows Townshend, Clapton, Beck and Page

featuring on most of Tharpe's Delta styled recordings. By 1941, Rosetta is seen with a blonde Gibson L5 archtop that is likely the guitar she experimented attaching a pickup to later in the 40s. For her 1957 tour with Chris Barber, Tharpe literally rocked up with a P-90-equipped Gibson Les Paul Goldtop with a trapeze tailpiece. You can imagine those young future rock stars gazing in awe at this imposing black woman tearing off a barrage of distorted licks. It would have been truly mindblowing at the time. In 1960, Tharpe was filmed at the Antibes Jazz festival backed by the Ian Wheeler & Ken Sims Sims Jazz Band. For this trip, her travel companion was a Gretsch G6117 Double Anniversary, a non-Bigsby version. Later in the 60s, Rosetta is seen with a sunburst Gibson ES-330 and, in 1970, the year of her forced retirement, she was still purveying those piercing licks via a Gibson Barney Kessel signature model.

Making Tracks

The one guitar Tharpe will forever be associated with, though, is her white 1961 Gibson SG Custom. This is the guitar that features on the majority of existing film, most notably the iconic footage of her playing at the disused Wilbraham Road train station in South Manchester on 7 May 1964. Recorded for Granada TV while the aforementioned Gospel And Blues Caravan show was touring, the footage shows Sister Rosetta and the other members of the troupe performing on one platform while the audience sat across the tracks on the other. The impact this show had cannot be underestimated as, for so many, it would have been their first exposure to authentic black American music – music that was known well to the young musicians frequenting the blues clubs that had cropped up around the country but almost alien to the majority of the public. From this moment, the British take on the blues left the underground, exploded into the mainstream and things were never the same again.

Some 50 years of performing and touring finally caught up with Tharpe when, in 1970, she suffered a stroke that put an end to her touring life. She had lived with diabetes for several years, which, after the stroke, forced her to have a leg amputated. After recovering, Rosetta was booked for a recording session in October 1973. The evening before the session she suffered another – this time fatal – stroke at her home in Philadelphia.

Sadly, it wasn't until 2008 that Tharpe finally had a gravestone to mark her resting place, but, by this time at least, interest in her life and work was renewed and in the years that followed Rosetta received several 'hall of fame' nominations. Tharpe also appears in the 2022 Baz Luhrmann-directed Elvis Presley biopic. In the scene, a young Presley is in a late night club on Beale Street, Memphis, where he marvels at the voice of Sister Rosetta Tharpe (played by Yola) blending gospel and blues into an intoxicating cocktail of sound that Elvis himself – along with millions of others – was utterly captivated by. G

High & Mighty

High-level acoustic maker turned electric champion Alister Atkin has already successfully cloned the classic T and S styles. Now, he explores something a little different with a brace of new designs

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin

ATKIN MINDHORN DELUXE & THE BOOSH OS

£3,499 & £3,199

CONTACT **Atkin Guitars** PHONE **01227 719933** WEB **https://atkinguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **Unusual names, aren't they?**
Alister Atkin turns out to be quite a fan of alternative comedy performer and writer Julian Barratt who created *The Mighty Boosh* with Noel Fielding. Perhaps lesser known is the 2016 film *Mindhorn*, co-written and starring Julian as Richard Thorncroft, a down on his heels ex-TV cop named Detective Bruce Mindhorn. Well, you asked.

2. **The prices are a little more serious, however...**
Agreed, not everyone has the cash to splash on either of these whimsically named instruments. But Atkin's company is all about quality, as its world-class acoustics have proved, and these models are very good.

3. **Aren't bashed-up-a-bit Fender-inspired electrics becoming a bit of a cliché?**
These are on point in terms of current boutique style, especially when you add in the lightweight (obeche) bodies and roasted figured maple necks. Cliché or not, it's quite the recipe for a superb-sounding electric guitar.

As much as we enjoyed Atkin's The Fifty-Two and The Fifty-Four in issue 484, let's face it, they were a 'Telecaster' and 'Stratocaster' respectively with the wrong headstock. Now, Atkin is far from the only guilty party in that regard, but we do like something a little different and original on our pages. And that's what we have here. If you're a fully paid-up member of the 'if it wasn't designed before 1965, I ain't playing it' brigade, look away now.

Or not... You see, both of these new bolt-on designs could actually have been designed during that initial golden age of our instrument. The Boosh starts with a T-style slab body, adds a bass-side horn and offsets the waist and base. The Mindhorn? Well, how about a Fender offset cross-bred with an SG perhaps?

Shapes aside, both designs have plenty of common features, the first of which is a deliciously light weight: with its larger body, the Mindhorn weighs in at just 2.89kg (6.36lb), while The Boosh trims that to 2.59kg (5.7lb). Neither is chambered nor semi-hollow but both employ lightweight obeche – as used by an increasing number of makers such as Seth Baccus, PJD and

1

THE RIVALS

In our interview with Alister Atkin that follows this review he gives UK-builder Seth Baccus a shout-out for turning him on to obeche. Seth's own builds are extremely special and his bolt-on single-cut Shoreline JM and T (£POA) use an obeche body, highly figured roasted maple and a host of pickup configurations and options. After the untimely closure of UKGB, which was making Shorelines, earlier this year, Seth says he's looking forward to "working as part of a very small, very specialist team here in my workshop in Cornwall".

PJD Guitars, another casualty from the UKGB closure, is also setting up a new facility in York and will continue its well-received Carey, St John and Woodford models. The company also uses obeche for models such as its aged Carey Apprentice. Prices start at £1,950.

As we report in this issue's Wishlist on page 26, Cambridge-based Fidelity embraces lighter-weight bolt-ons and luthier Matt Oram has started using English ash that's roasted here in the UK.

2

3

The unnerving illusion here is that both Mindhorn and Boosh designs look, feel and sound like forgotten pawn-shop prizes

Cream T, for example – for their Fender-thickness bodies. The bodies and Gotoh hardware on both are lightly aged, too; Atkin classes this as its middle level 'medium' ageing and you have an option of light or heavy (the latter adds £150). As you'd expect, the finishes are nitro and there's a wide colour choice. The paint ageing is limited to the bodies and colour-matching headstock face, and you don't need us to tell you that relicing has become high art in the guitar world. This medium level illustrates a less-is-more approach and the Mindhorn, which seems more lightly aged, is especially convincing. The Boosh is perhaps a little more contrived, and on both there's quite excessive wear around the rear string ferrules suggesting the imaginary previous owner only restrung their guitars in the dark without their glasses on.

Not surprisingly, the necks are very similar here and to those previous Atkin lookalikes we evaluated. If we're honest, rather like a band's name, the headstock shape has grown on us, with the help of the colour matching used here, that relieved black line on the treble side, and a beautifully old-school decal. It's impossible to fault the craft.

1. Like the body finish, the colour-matched headstocks are lightly aged, as are the Gotoh split-post tuners. Truss rod access is easy and not vintage-bolt-on style

2. As on The Boosh, the Mindhorn uses a T-style through-strung bridge and In Tune saddles, although this one is cut down and typically used with a bridge humbucker

3. In its Deluxe format you get these well done 60s-style block inlays and edge binding. The Mindhorn Standard 'board is unbound with clay dot inlays like our Boosh OS

4. Another quite common mod is the reverse-style control plate here that puts the volume control in the 'right' place

5. The heel's rounding is certainly more comfortable in higher positions than that of the guitars the designs were inspired by. The stamped serial numbers continue the far-from-modern vibe

Feel & Sounds

Not everyone cares about the weight of their instrument, but if you do, you'll really fall for the charms of either of the guitars here. Combine that with the silky smooth bare wood feel of the neck back and we're engaged just by lifting either off its stand. The neck-work is superb and that includes a good choice of medium/tall fret wire on the 254mm (10-inch) face, nicely rolled worn-in fingerboard edges, and perfectly rounded fret ends and dialled-in setup.

If you care about the weight of your instrument, then you'll really fall for the charms of either of the guitars here

Of course, they should feel good at this price, but again it's not just the detail, it's the overall illusion that these feel like older, well-used instruments that have just had a very good refret.

As we said, the neck shapes and size are very similar, a good relaxed C shape that's perhaps a little thinner in depth than you'd expect – a hair over 20mm deep at the 1st fret and just under 23mm by the 12th. But it's a superbly crafted shape with almost a hint of a V in lower positions and that feels wider and deeper than it measures in higher positions. The heel is rounded on the treble

6. Outwardly, you see a very vintage-style T-style single coil, although here Atkin doesn't employ a baseplate. The Gotoh bridge with its relaxed side walls is a popular choice, along with those 'In Tune' brass saddles

side and matched by the neckplate (where you'll find the stamped serial number) and it helps the upper-position comfort with an airy setup that has very little relief.

Both guitars feel very alive, just the sort of thing that might attract you to a good vintage guitar. Nothing is getting in the way of the playing experience.

Sonically, The Boosh's T-style bridge and soapbar single coil in the neck position suggest sounds we've all heard plenty of times and so there are really no surprises here. The bridge ticks all the Americana boxes alone, twangin' and visceral, rather than trying to be over beefy or too humbucker-like. That's covered by the soapbar, which is very creamy and Gibson-like and quite the contrast to the bridge.

The Mindhorn's unique-design single coils, which almost disappear on the dark tortoiseshell pickguard, appear less tonally specific yet sound very much in the intended Jazzmaster-meets-P-90 territory with a quick attack and plenty of depth. It's definitely a West Coast sound that might have you thinking, 'Where's the vibrato arm?' But it has a welcome twist: pull up the Tele-knobbed tone control and, irrespective of the pickup selector position, we go to both-pickups-on in series, sort of Danelectro-like, a sound that has more power and fullness without losing all of the clarity. It's an obvious 'solo boost' voice and an outstanding sound for slide.

UNDER THE HOOD

What's going on inside? And what about those unusual-looking pickups on the Mindhorn?

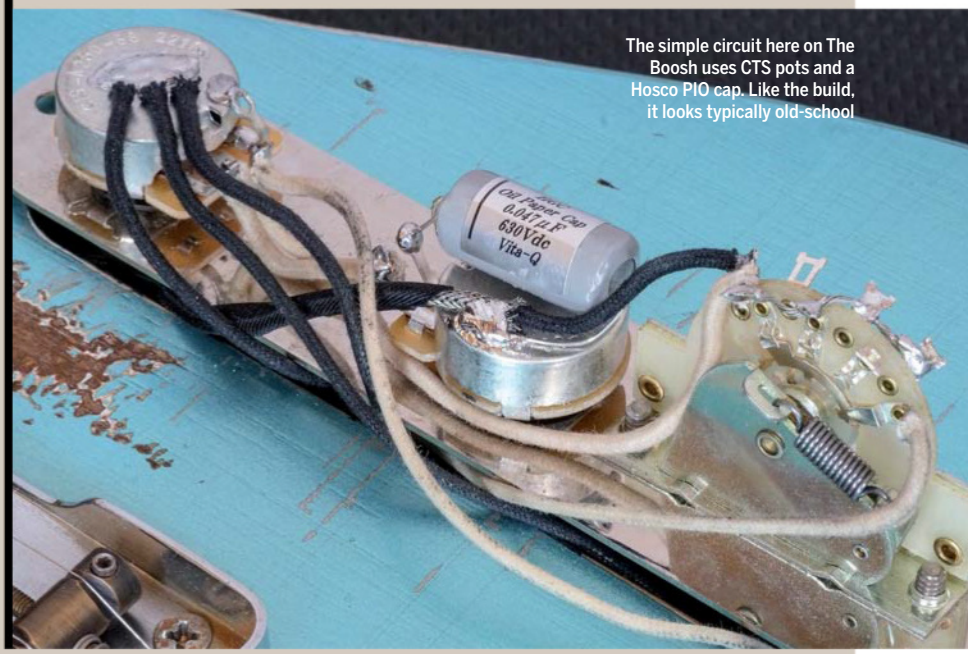
The Mindhorn has a pretty simple drive with just its master volume and tone (with a pull switch to override the three-way toggle pickup selector and put both pickups on, in series), but the MH90's certainly look different. "It's kind of in between a Jazzmaster pickup and a P-90," says Atkin's Laurence Lock who looks after the pickup designs and fabrication. "They use Alnico V rods and they're wound quite hot so there's a modern output, around 10,000 winds – it varies a bit between the two pickups – like a normal P-90, which would have a similar amount of winds. So we started there. It's heavy Formvar wire so it's more like a 50s or 60s Stratocaster; the coating on the wire is a little thicker [than plain enamel] so that has its own thing going on. They're shallower than a Strat or Tele pickup, like a P-90, but the magnets are more like a Fender."

Along with The Boosh's reverse control plate that places the volume right next to the bridge, there are a few other tricks. "We did something a little different in that we got rid of the baseplate [on the bridge pickup] – which isn't very vintage, but it's a safe option in terms of microphonics if you want to go for a lot of gain. We also wound it a little bit hotter so it's not so shrill. We kept with plain enamel wire and we used Alnico V rods, again to keep it bright enough without the baseplate. We also wanted something that would work well with the P-90 at the neck so that's around 7kohms, if I remember correctly, which is quite a low output for a P-90, but it means it brightens things up a little. Again ,we used Alnico V for the bar magnets. Pairing a P-90 with a single coil at the bridge is a bit of a crazy thing to do as they're very different animals, so we tried to pair them so the difference wasn't too ridiculous."

> "The Mindhorn's pickup is between a Jazzmaster pickup and a P-90"
> ***Laurence Lock***

Measured at output, the Mindhorn's DCRs are approximately 7.64kohms (bridge) and 7.05k (neck). The Boosh's single coils read slightly lower: 6.24k (bridge) and 6.84k (neck).

CTS 250k pots are used on both The Boosh and Mindhorn, along with a Hosco Vita-Q paper-in-oil 0.047µf cap on both, not to mention old-style cloth-covered wire. The Mindhorn's pull-switch tone control is CTS as well, the company's new 'circuit board' type.



The simple circuit here on The Boosh uses CTS pots and a Hosco PIO cap. Like the build, it looks typically old-school

7. Alongside the serial number, the headstock back proclaims the guitar is 'Made In England' – and homegrown craft just keeps getting better

Verdict

New designs take a while to get used to, just like a new song can take a few listens. But the unnerving illusion here is that both designs look, feel and sound like forgotten pawn-shop prizes. And yet they really do feel exceptional, play superbly and sound it, too. The Boosh OS is perhaps the more recognisable in terms of its voice, while the less specific Mindhorn is harder to pigeonhole and could well be a classic in the making: it's rootsy, rocking and tailor-made for a pedalboard.

> Both guitars feel very alive, which is just the sort of thing that might attract you to a good vintage guitar

We're becoming spoiled for choice by the exceptional craft of an increasing number of guitar makers here in the UK. And just as Atkin has conquered the acoustic, on the evidence here the company now looks set to be a more than credible addition to the electric world. You need to get one of these guitars in your hands.

ATKIN MINDHORN DELUXE

PRICE: £3,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Double-cutaway, offset solidbody electric
BODY: Obeche
NECK: Quarter-sawn roasted flame maple, medium C vintage profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.2mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian rosewood, pearloid block inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium/tall profile
HARDWARE: Atkin by Gotoh cut-down through-strung bridge with three brass 'In-Tune' saddles, Gotoh vintage-style – lightly aged nickel
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: Atkin hand-wound MH90 single-coil set, 3-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and tone (with pull switch for series link of both pickups)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.89/6.36
OPTIONS: The Mindhorn range starts with the Standard (with unbound 'board and dot inlays) at £3,299, then there's the HH Standard (£3,499) and HH Deluxe (£3,699). Custom-order options include pickup types, mahogany neck and alder or swamp ash bodies, plus 3 levels of ageing and finish options
RANGE OPTIONS: See Boosh OS
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, add £100
FINISH: Olympic White, medium aged nitro-cellulose

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Very detailed high-level craft; authentic light ageing; superb weight, feel and playability; excellent own-design single coils

CONS Not a cheap date and not everyone will get the new design; original pickups mean you can't load in your aftermarket favourites

ATKIN THE BOOSH OS

PRICE: £3,199 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Double-cutaway, offset solidbody electric
BODY: Obeche
NECK: Quarter-sawn roasted flame maple, medium C vintage profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.48mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, 'clay' dot inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium/tall profile
HARDWARE: Atkin by Gotoh 'drop-sided' T-type through-strung bridge with 3x brass 'In-Tune' saddles, Gotoh vintage-style – lightly aged nickel
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: Atkin hand-wound MH90 single-coil set, 3-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and tone (with pull switch for series link of both pickups)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.59/5.7
OPTIONS: Also available with non-offset waist and base as The Boosh Standard (same price). See Mindhorn (left) for custom options
RANGE OPTIONS: The Boosh is the only other original-style in the range. The T-style Fifty-Two and Fifty-Nine start at £3,199; the Sixty-Eight at £3,399. The Fifty-Four, Sixty-Three and Sixty-Nine S-styles all start at £3,199
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, add £100
FINISH: Pelham Blue metallic, medium aged nitrocellulose

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Original yet familiar-looking take on a T-style electric; high craft, even lighter weight and very well-voiced pickups

CONS A sizeable investment; some of the ageing is a little contrived, but it wouldn't stop us adding it to our arsenal

Manson

GUITAR WORKS

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ORYX VII
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ORYX

Canterbury Tales

Why on earth would one of the world's best acoustic guitar makers start building electrics? Let's ask the man himself...

Words Dave Burrluck

Companies that successfully make both acoustic and electric guitars under the same roof are not common. And for acoustic-maker Alister Atkin, who founded his company back in 1995 in Canterbury, adding electric guitars to his catalogue started as, well, an April Fool's joke back in 2020.

"We made two of our Eighty-Five models, proper Jackson-style with a paint job based on the surfboard in *Back To The Future*: green, pink and yellow," Alister tells us. "We just thought, 'Let's do something stupid that people would never associate with a brand like ours: two guitars made by hand by some of the lads here who are absolute geeks over that stuff.' It was just after Covid and we were up for some light-hearted fun, but I think they generated more publicity than anything else we'd ever released!

"After that we thought, 'Okay, we can come back to those, but in the meantime let's just learn how to make a really good S-style and a really good T-style. Start there. Let's work out all the things we like about those guitars and even if they never get to a dealer we'd see how they were done and if we can do it.'"

> "You've got to keep it interesting. You don't get anywhere unless you try out new stuff"

By January 2022, Alister felt he'd cracked the code and asked if we'd like to take a look at a Fifty-Two and Fifty-Four, which appeared back in issue 484 of *Guitarist*. Coincidentally, that issue was published on 1 April! The now six-strong range is in high demand and this year Atkin is making around 200 electrics alongside 500 of its highly regarded acoustics.

While there seems an endless market for clones or interpretations of the classics from Fender or Gibson, not every maker successfully branches out into original designs. "I've been a big fan of a lot of country players. Do you know Buddy Miller?" asks Alister. "He uses some very rough and ready guitars, like Wandrè, an Italian brand from the 60s, and when you're into that style of music you see quite a lot of players using unusual stuff, interesting-looking guitars. I think Laurence [Lock, Alister's right-hand man] and the other lads here came at it with a love of offsets, too. Ultimately, I think we just wanted to create something that worked well for us.

"You've got to keep it interesting," he continues. "You don't get anywhere unless you try out new stuff. You don't get to the big hits until you're written a few minor ones – but there's always someone who likes that stuff along the way. As soon as we sent a Mindhorn out to a dealer it sold. The customer loves it and is messaging us asking for another one. Justin Hawkins has just ordered a couple with some pretty cool things onboard, too."

Alister Atkin with the Mindhorn, one of the latest additions to his electric guitar line

Weight Watching

As we reported in that previous review, like the current Atkin S and T styles, the new Mindhorn and Boosh use solid obeche for their lightweight bodies. "When we'd started [on the electrics] we were looking around at woods we could use and we became aware that swamp ash was on its way out," Alister explains. "We started chatting to other makers, Seth Baccus being one of them. Seth said he was using obeche, so we got some in. Obviously, we immediately realised how light it was, but then also how good it was to work with. But there does seem to be a trend at the moment for lighter guitars. I went to a customer's house recently and he had a couple of ash Telecasters. Once you've got used to obeche you realise just how heavy ash can be!"

There is a huge range of colour options and styles on Atkin electrics as displayed on this trio of Mindhorns

Above: In addition to our reviewed offset waist/base version, The Boosh is also available as the Standard, here in a 'Burst finish

Below: While Laurence Lock takes care of the design and manufacture of the Atkin pickups, here he's on final setup duties

"We did try paulownia," interjects Laurence, "but thought that was a bridge too far. A little bit too light, too much like a toy we found, and you also question whether things like the six screws that hold a vibrato will stay in the wood."

Also on-trend is the use of roasted maple necks for the new-design guitars. "We do all of our baking for the woods we use on our acoustics here, on site," says Alister, "but the company that supplies most of us makers with roasted maple is actually in Nova Scotia, Canada. It's just down the road from where my wife comes from, so I'm over there once or twice a year. It means I can choose exactly what I want at the source: the pick of the bunch, really. It's top-notch and the guy who does it is really on top of it."

The aged finishing, another modern essential for the boutique builder, is something that Atkin's acoustics are well known for. "I started doing that around 2009/2010. Being a vintage acoustic guitar buff, you look at those old instruments and think they look interesting, but it actually came about after we dropped a guitar. So we thought, 'Let's just see if we could convincingly relic it.' It went on our website and people started ordering them. Then at that point Martin Guitars bought one and after a conversation with them I realised we really do need to go under the bonnet with this. I then spent a good few years getting the process sorted to a point that it really stood up as a viable finish... with much disdain from many people," he laughs.

> "We're looking at doing a carved-top semi-hollow and a shorter scale Boosh"

Atkin's new-design electrics won't stop with the Mindhorn and Boosh. "We're going to push on with stuff we like," Alister concludes. "We've been looking at doing a carved-top semi-hollow – like a thinline T-style with a carved top – and a shorter 24-inch scale offset Boosh."

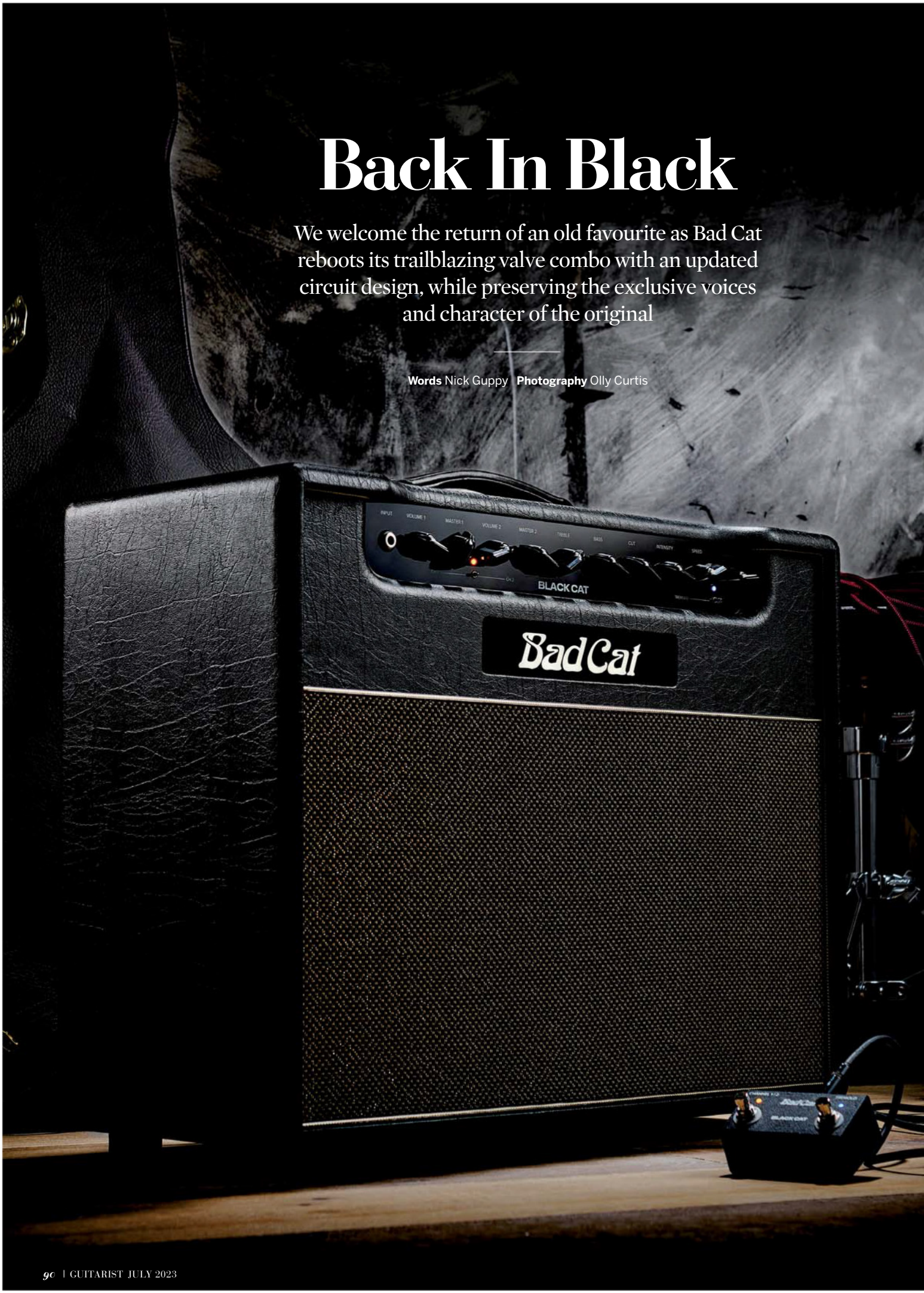
The team will be installing a Plek machine in the next few weeks, too, to help with consistency on the electrics as production increases. "Our thing has always been, you don't use any new machine until it does as good, or better, a job than we do already."

Atkin might make guitars that look and feel like old ones, but this is a thoroughly modern guitar company. Here's to the next new design! G

Back In Black

We welcome the return of an old favourite as Bad Cat reboots its trailblazing valve combo with an updated circuit design, while preserving the exclusive voices and character of the original

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis



BAD CAT BLACK CAT 1X12 COMBO £1,899

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What You Need To Know

1 Where does Bad Cat come from?
Bad Cat was founded by James Heidrich in 2000 in Southern California, producing handmade valve designs to satisfy the demand for high-end guitar tone. Early models were designed and built by Matchless's Mark Sampson, with later Bad Cat products evolving into their own distinct character.

2 What's the difference between printed circuit and hand wired?
The only real difference today is cost. A hand-wired amp takes much longer to build. In terms of tone, there's no real difference – properly designed PCB amplifiers boast better consistency and reliability, and your pocket will thank you.

3 What's special about the loudspeaker here?
It's an exclusive version of the Celestion Vintage 30, which is made in the UK to Bad Cat's specifications. Only a few manufacturers have UK-made Celestion drivers and Bad Cat is one of them.

Founded at the turn of the millennium, Bad Cat's original mission was to fill a hole left in the market for high-end guitar amplification following the temporary demise of Matchless in 1999. It's well known that Matchless co-founder and designer Mark Sampson helped out with some initial design and fabrication, hence in the very early days there was a close similarity between Matchless and Bad Cat products. But Bad Cat's range quickly diverged with innovative features and new models, including the K-Master circuit and the well-received Hot Cat and USA Player amplifiers.

Sampson left to explore new horizons while Bad Cat carried on, and the company has recently relaunched its brand with an entirely new range of updated heads and combos, created by owner John Thompson and CEO and designer Peter Arends. Here, we're looking at the highly anticipated reincarnation of one of Bad Cat's first amplifiers, now available as a 1x12 combo: the Black Cat.

This is a handsome, traditionally styled amp featuring a front-facing control panel surrounded by black vinyl and gold piping, with an illuminated logo atop the trademark gold-sparkle grille. Underneath the vinyl, there's a Baltic birch plywood cabinet supporting a single custom-made 12-inch Celestion loudspeaker and a robust aluminium chassis with two oversized transformers and a choke.

Inside the chassis, most of the electronics are mounted on one large high-quality PCB, including the front-panel controls and preamp valve sockets. There's a mix

1

1. The new Black Cat features the same high-quality Baltic birch ply cabinets, thick vinyl and gold-sparkle grille as the original, with a trademark illuminated badge that also serves as a power indicator

2

of through-hole resistors and capacitors, together with three relays and a couple of surface-mount chips for the Black Cat's digital reverb. Smaller boards support the input jack, rear-panel jacks and sockets for the Black Cat's cathode-biased pair of EL84-Rs, which produce around 20 watts. Soldering and wiring is clean and neat; lots of careful cable twisting reduces noise.

The Black Cat is a two-channel design, although it's quite different from the original amplifier with two pairs of gain and master volume controls sharing treble and bass EQ knobs. There's also a global Cut tone control sitting on the preamp output, which rolls off the highs as the chickenhead knob is turned clockwise – a subtle nod to Vox's AC30, which was part of the inspiration for the original Black Cat design and its ancestors. Lastly, there are speed and intensity controls for the Black Cat's bias-modulated tremolo effect and a level control for the reverb.

On the rear panel, you'll find a pair of send and return jacks for the buffered effects loop and a comprehensive choice of speaker outlets, with five jack sockets offering four-, eight- and 16-ohm options, together with a fixed level line out suitable for driving external power amps or IR loaders. There's also a jack socket for the Black Cat's two-button footswitch, which toggles the channels and tremolo effects. Status LEDs on the footswitch are duplicated on the front panel as two small toggle switches for when the footswitch isn't needed.

Overall, it's clearly built to last, with very high-quality components and classic styling, looking the part for stage, studio and home use.

Feel & Sounds

We tried out the Black Cat with various guitars, including an old Strat, a borrowed original 1972 Les Paul Custom and a superb Gibson Custom Shop '63 ES-335 replica. The Black Cat purrs into life with practically zero hiss and background hum, thanks to a DC heater filament supply and transformers at least double the size of those typically found in other similar amps. The plus-size transformers

THE RIVALS

Fender's '65 Deluxe Reverb (£1,639) has plenty of vintage mojo and this printed circuit board version is relatively affordable compared with its Custom Shop hand-wired counterpart. Teamed with a good drive pedal, it's a formidable weapon for small clubs, pubs and the studio. Vox's AC15C1X (£1,049) is loaded with the fabled Celestion Alnico Blue loudspeaker for a thoroughly vintage nuanced tone experience and remains relatively portable against its 2x12 big brother. Victory's Copper Deluxe 1x12 combo (£2,349) delivers the company's take on the original Dartford EL84 magic, with built-in spring reverb, tremolo and a Celestion Alnico Gold loudspeaker.

3

2. There are two footswitchable channels, with separate gain and master volume knobs, making it easy to dial in your ideal rhythm and solo levels. The gain controls overlap nicely, with clean to mild crunch on Channel 1 and higher gain solo stuff on Channel 2

mean significantly reduced mechanical hum, making the Black Cat ideal for low-volume use at home, either for practice or recording. "Transformer certification is one of the biggest hurdles a manufacturer has to overcome," explains Peter Arends, "so it made sense to certify just one set of transformers and use them for all our new models. The increased transformer size on the smaller amplifiers and the reduced mechanical noise is a side benefit of that."

The signature Bad Cat tone is all about clarity and string separation, which is immediately obvious on Channel 1's range of pristine cleans and classic 60s chime. With the master volume turned up high and the gain control all the way up, there's a very pleasing mild crunch that works really well with beefy humbuckers, nailing the mid-60s Blues Invasion tones of The Beatles, Humble Pie and The Stones. Back the gain off to around half and you'll find the jangly harmonics of early Byrds and Creedence Clearwater Revival, while setting it to just under half with a Strat puts you firmly in Shadows and Ventures territory, enhanced by the Black Cat's onboard reverb and bias tremolo.

The tone controls do take a little getting used to, but after a few minutes they quickly become intuitive. "The tone network is a passive EQ, with separate operating points for the clean and overdrive channel," continues Peter. "The treble control works like a mid bell/scoop control, where turning it anti-clockwise emphasises mids, while turning it clockwise emphasises bass and treble frequencies. The bass control works like a post/mastering EQ, so the amount of low frequencies doesn't change the characteristics of the signal. The effectiveness of the controls is due to the headroom of the circuitry, enabled by the EQ's position and matching it to the surrounding stages."

3. The deceptively simple passive tone controls are wide ranging yet quick and easy to use, dialling in any guitar in seconds. The Treble control has a neutral centre position, emphasising highs and lows turned clockwise, or mids when turned anti-clockwise. The independent Bass control adds extra low-end, while the Cut knob works like the old Vox AC30, reducing highs at the end of the preamp chain

The signature Bad Cat tone is all about clarity and string separation, which is immediately obvious on Channel 1

4

After the main EQ, the Black Cat's Cut knob acts as a final edit on the tone before the signal reaches the output stage, progressively rolling off highs as the knob is turned clockwise.

Switching to Channel 2 keeps the same complex harmonics and string separation, with extra gain for crunch and solos. There's more than enough drive here to make even the relatively low-powered single coils of our Strat sing, while the claws really come out with a decent humbucker. The Black Cat's Treble control is particularly effective on this channel, letting you dial in just the right amount of scoop to achieve a perfect midrange balance in seconds. With Channel 2's gain turned up to around two o'clock and the master volume pushing the EL84s to the edge, the lead sounds are exceptional, seamlessly blending American and British influences with easily controlled feedback and an addictive articulation that tracks every nuance of string attack and vibrato.

Our borrowed '72 LP Custom sounded particularly impressive, the Black Cat nailing everything from Aerosmith and Bryan Adams to Sex Pistols and Peter Frampton, all with pinpoint accuracy.

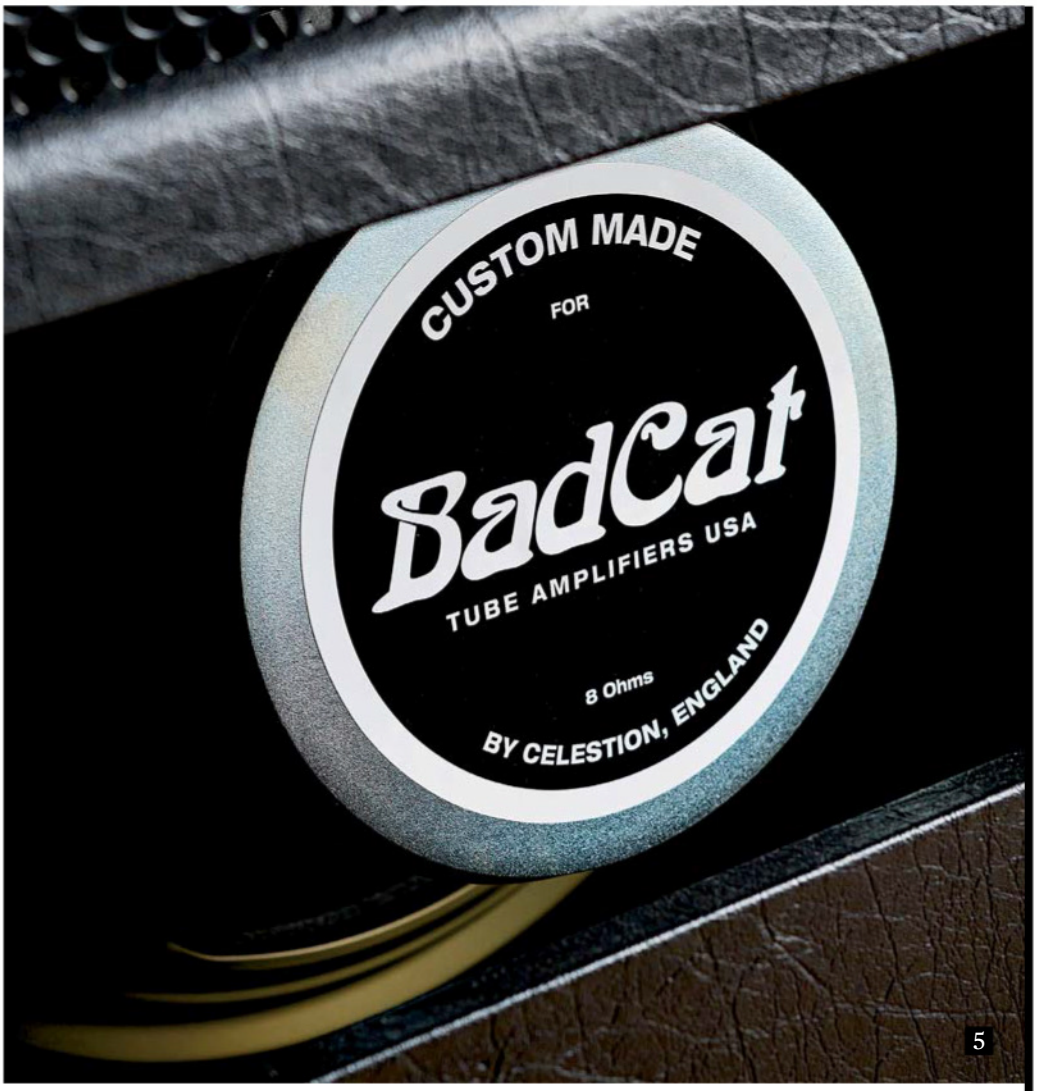
The tremolo and reverb effects are equally rewarding to use, with a well-judged range of speed and intensity from the trem and a warm medium hall decay that's ideal for subtle ambience or full-on surf. "The effects work really well on both channels," Peter agrees. "The tremolo is an easy effect to do, but not so easy to do well. We spent a lot of time tuning it to get the right feel across both channels. Same with the reverb, where a lot of time went into getting the levels right so the reverb doesn't sound harsh or overloaded and you can use it all."

Used with a live band, the Black Cat's 20-watt output was more than enough to cope with an averagely loud drum kit and an

It's actually very good value for money, with superlative tone and response, and low noise performance that's hard to beat

4. You can hook up to most commonly available enclosures via the selection of speaker output sockets. Meanwhile, there's a fixed level line out that can be hooked up to bigger power amps or IR loaders as required. There's also a buffered series effects loop for interfacing your favourite delay or modulation effects

5. The Black Cat uses an exclusive Celestion 12-inch speaker based on the Vintage 30 that's made in the UK to the US brand's specifications. It's impressively loud and keeps all the note definition intact without flapping, even at full volume



5

enthusiastic audience, while the low noise floor works very nicely with pedals. We used a small 'board with some typical wah, drive, delay and modulation effects plugged into the input jack, with impressive results.

Verdict

It's great to see Bad Cat back again with an exciting new range of amps that take full advantage of the cost-effectiveness and reliability of modern manufacturing and components, without compromising the coveted tones of the originals. The original Black Cat signature voice is still here, in addition to an expanded range that covers most musical genres, though it's particularly well suited to modern country, blues, roots and classic rock where the complex harmonics and highly responsive dynamics are equally rewarding to subtle nuance or savage attack.

Aimed squarely at professionals and serious amateurs, the Black Cat clearly isn't an impulse buy. However, set against direct competition costing twice as much or more, we reckon it's actually very good value for money, with superlative tone and response, and low noise performance that's hard to beat, even at this rarefied level.

As for build quality, if you want to make consistently great-sounding amplifiers then modern high-quality PCBs are the only way to go, with obvious savings in assembly costs translating into more affordable products. There are no special components on the Bad Cat's board, so future servicing won't present any problems, either.

In the volume stakes, we think the lower output wattage actually makes the amp easier to drive, while the Black Cat's 1x12 format is ideal for most gigs. Okay, it's no lightweight, but it's far easier to lift and carry compared with its 2x12 ancestor.

In today's market where we're increasingly overwhelmed by digital products, it's worth remembering the magic of the electric guitar came from very simple analogue beginnings and sometimes one good valve amp is all you need to rediscover that enjoyment. We think the new improved Black Cat is currently one of the best there is, at any price.

BAD CAT BLACK CAT 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £1,899
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Valve preamp, valve power amp
VALVES: 1x JJ ECC83S, 2x EH12AX7, 2x EL84-R
OUTPUT: 20W RMS
DIMENSIONS: 605 (w) x 265 (d) x 485mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 22/48
CABINET: Baltic birch ply
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x12" Celestion Bad Cat custom design, made in UK
CHANNELS: 2, footswitchable clean and overdrive
CONTROLS: Volume 1, Master 1, Volume 2, Master 2 Treble, bass, cut. Tremolo intensity and speed, reverb level
FOOTSWITCH: 2-button footswitch (supplied) changes channels and toggles tremolo function
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Buffered series effects loop, bias-modulated tremolo, studio-quality digital reverb, fixed level line out
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Also available as a head for £1,799, with a matching 1x12 speaker cabinet for £549

Guitarist GOLD

10/10

PROS Well made; good looking; exceptional tone to fit a wide range of musical genres; reasonable price for top-drawer USA-made amp; using just five valves keeps maintenance costs down

CONS A heavy lift – a case of 'never mind the quality, feel the weight', due to the superb custom Celestion loudspeaker and outsized transformers

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Back In The Game

Now under new ownership by Cor-Tek, the once-lost DOD brand is back again with brand-new versions of some old favourites

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

DOD COMPRESSOR 280, ENVELOPE FILTER 440, GONKULATOR & OVERDRIVE PREAMP 250

£105, £105, £129 & £99

CONTACT **440 Distribution** PHONE **01943 818599** WEB **www.digitech.com**

What You Need To Know

1 I thought DOD had gone for good...
DOD and DigiTech pedals disappeared from parent company Harman's website some time ago, but the DigiTech/DOD brand is back with a series of updated classic DOD models, having been acquired by Cor-Tek Corporation, maker of Cort and many other-brand guitars.

2 So, are the pedals the same as the originals?
Well, Tom Cram – who has worked everywhere from the manufacturing floor to marketing in the DOD fold – originally resurrected the brand for Harman with a bunch of pedals updated for modern usage. He's now back in control and these are updates on that series.

3 Are there likely to be any more DOD pedals in the offing?
Absolutely. The company says its intention is to reintroduce the classics and to bring new pedals to market, too.

DOD pedals have been around since the mid-1970s, but the brand has had several different owners over the years, along with its sister name DigiTech. A major resurgence occurred when the brand was owned by Harman from the early 90s and the company took on Tom Cram to revive its fortunes, resulting in revamped versions of its older pedals and a range of new designs. The purchase of Harman by Samsung in 2017, however, saw the enforced departure of Tom and his team.

Roll on a few years and DOD is making its comeback, having been acquired by Cor-Tek, the company behind Cort guitars, and with Tom Cram back in the driving seat. Not only are there plans to make new versions of many of DOD's longstanding range available again, the company is also looking at new, original designs further down the line. For this initial release, nine familiar compact pedals have returned: the four we're looking at in this review – the Compressor 280, Envelope Filter 440, Gonkulator Ring Mod and Overdrive Preamp 250 – plus the Meatbox, Bifet Boost 410, Boneshaker, Gunslinger and Phasor 201.

Compressor 280

There's a certain simplicity to two-knob compressors that makes them a preferred choice for players who like to dial in quickly and get on with things – and the new Compressor 280 delivers on that front with just Comp and Level knobs. Keeping the

1. Just two knobs makes it easy to dial in your sound with the Compressor 280. Set them for your optimum sound and just leave the pedal switched on as an integral part of your core tone

2. DOD's distinctive-looking body shape with the raised top section came about in the mid-70s to differentiate them from the similarly sized MXR pedals

3. This switch on the Envelope Filter 440 sets the direction of the filter sweep. The up position will give you the brighter sounds, the down position darker and deeper sounds

4. Two separate effects that can be blended on the Gonkulator, Gain and Dist, control the distortion, while Freq and Ring control the ring modulation. The Output knob sets the overall output level

Comp knob down low for just a tickle of compression, there's plenty available from about one o'clock on the Level knob to give your amp a substantial boost.

Moving up the compression scale you'll find that the electro-optical compression here sounds really natural with no obvious shaping being applied either to the attack of the note or the way that it moves into the sustain phase – just a smooth extension of the note length as it fades that makes this a good choice for slide players. What you're getting here makes this pedal a perfect contender for a favourite role as an always-on signal enhancer, offering improved consistency and smoothness, while putting a pleasing amount of boost into the front of the amp.

Envelope Filter 440

Based on a design from the 70s, the 440 pedal has the typical two-knob envelope filter array of Level and Range controls. Level sets the pedal's sensitivity and determines how the filter will be triggered by your playing dynamics. Set at minimum, you'll have to dig in hard to get the full effect, but between there and the fully clockwise point – where the filter will trigger at the slightest touch – you'll find a sweet spot that best suits you.

The distortion in itself may be enough to make the Gonkulator Ring Mod pedal a worthwhile purchase

The Range knob controls the tonal nature of the filter sweep; you'll be hearing more of the top-end frequencies swept as you turn it clockwise. On top of these, you have two directions for the filter sweep that place the emphasis on different portions of the frequency spectrum – one direction that starts with the high-end, the other with the low-end. Careful juxtaposition of the knobs yields a range of expressiveness that can result in funky vocal quackiness for single notes or a pronounced 'wow' effect, all the more intense if you put a dirt pedal in front of it.

Gonkulator Ring Mod

A ring modulation pedal isn't on everyone's wishlist, but it's an interesting effect that can be used to add a subtly different tonal slant to your sound or to offer really dramatic tonal changes. The Gonkulator can be thought of as having two effects; besides the ring mod you also get raucous fuzzy distortion that runs in parallel with it.

The Ring and Dist knobs turn up the level of their named effects from silence, so you can use them individually or create whatever layered blend of the two you'd like. The distortion in itself may be enough to make the pedal a worthwhile purchase. It's set up by juxtaposition of the Gain and Distortion knobs and can run from low-level crunch to full-on thick, sustain-y distortion.

Key to the ringmod sound is the Freq knob, which adjusts the carrier frequency over a range of several octaves so you can tune it to suit your playing or dial in some dissonance. This pedal opens up a world of metallic cadences. If it's your thing, you can use the Gonkulator for an almighty atonal freak-out, but it can be subtle, too; using the ringmod as a colour or texture for the distortion yields great results, endowing it with an underlying metallic sheen.

Overdrive Preamp 250

One of the earliest DOD pedals, with the original unit dating from around 1974, the Overdrive Preamp 250 features silicon diode clipping circuitry to create overdrive and distortion sounds.

There's no Tone knob here, just Gain and Level, but the overall tonal balance is

Each pedal's baseplate gives you four-screw access if you wish to use a battery rather than run it from a standard nine-volt adaptor

THE RIVALS

The Overdrive Preamp 250 has much in common with the MXR Distortion Plus (£89). There are some ring modulation pedals out there – Electro-Harmonix's Ring Thing ($271), for starters – but it's difficult to find a pedal that combines distortion with ringmod like the Gonkulator, although there is the Fredric Effects Grumbly Wolf (£100), which the company describes as a combined distortion, fuzz, octave and ring mod. For another optical two-knob compressor, you could look at the PRS Mary Cries (£219), while the Orange Kongpressor (£119) has more knobs to play with. The most recent envelope filter pedal we've reviewed is Gibson's Agena Envelope Filter (£165).

rather natural anyway, and the Gain knob actually tweaks the tone as you turn up the dirt, rolling off some bass and increasing the brightness. With Gain at minimum and Level set accordingly, you can use the pedal as a boost – not exactly a clean boost but one with a little grit in the sound. Further movement of the Gain knob takes you through some great drive tones until you reach some fuzz-like aggression at full gain. It's touch-responsive all the way along, so you can dig in to bring the dirt. This is a pedal that will work well with a clean amp when you dial in a sweet spot, but it's particularly good in pushing an already driven amp just that bit further.

Verdict

It's good to see DOD back again and with improved and reasonably priced versions of what went before. This group of pedals is a mixed bag, but they all do their designated jobs well. The more conventional preamp and compressor are pedals that could easily enhance any pedalboard. The other two here are more esoteric choices to add colour where needed: the envelope filter is a great (if predictable) example of the genre, but the Gonkulator's unique combination of effects could make it the perfect wildcard for your pedalboard. G

DOD COMPRESSOR 280

PRICE: £105
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Compressor pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Comp, Level, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 116 (d) x 52mm (h)

8/10

DOD ENVELOPE FILTER 440

PRICE: £105
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Envelope filter pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Level, Range, Voice switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 116 (d) x 52mm (h)

8/10

DOD GONKULATOR

PRICE: £129
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Ring modulation pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Gain, Dist, Output, Freq, Ring, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 116 (d) x 52 mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

DOD OVERDRIVE PREAMP 250

PRICE: £99
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Distortion pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Gain, Level, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 116 (d) x 52mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Compact size; solid build quality; welcome return of some favourites; competitively priced

CONS Envelope filter and ring mod are more niche choices

« BLUEPRINT »

TONE MAGNET

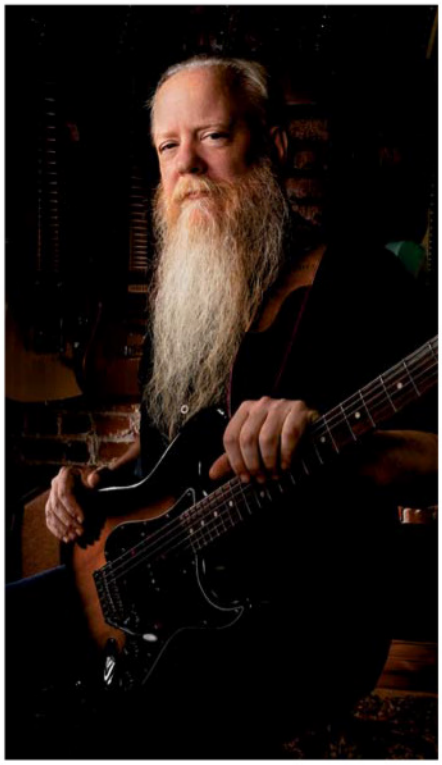
Jason Lollar is one of the most respected pickup makers in the world. He says his goal is not to 'make them like they used to' but instead to make pickups better than anything that's gone before. We learn the secrets of his masterly approach to tone…

Words Jamie Dickson

Poised and responsive, with a sonic vibe all of their own, Lollar is one of the few pickup brands whose products we could identify almost blindfold. Whether it's P-90s we've played in an Eastman semi on review or Tele pickups fitted to one of our Mod Squad creations, Lollars always seem to pull off the trick of being balanced yet never bland, clear yet never clinical, classic but never clone-like. So when founder Jason Lollar said yes to an in-depth chat about his approach to designing and building pickups – both traditional and progressive – we were intrigued to find out more. We join him to delve deep into Lollar pickups from A to Z, ranging from his earliest days as a designer to his most recent designs.

How did you start making pickups?
"Well, I started building electric guitars in the mid-70s. I went to Roberto-Venn [School of Luthiery] in Phoenix, Arizona, and they showed us how to make really rudimentary pickups, kind of like what Semie Mosrite used to make. They were made out of bits of plastic with a wood core and you'd glue it all together and drill it out. They had a little winder powered by a sewing-machine motor and a [model] train transformer. You were constantly getting shocked any time you touched that transformer...

"Anyways, after I went through that school, I kept building guitars through the 80s and 90s, and I was making pickups for most of them, too. It was saving me some money at the time and people liked them. Eventually, people started wanting me to make the pickups [as standalone products]. I built about 50 guitars in the 80s, but the pickups became popular and by the 2000s I wasn't making instruments primarily any more, I was just making pickups. So it just started with me in my garage while I was working a day job. I was playing music at nights and then I'm working 20-hour days, sometimes 48 hours straight, and it grew out of that."



Play it again: a veteran musician, Jason Lollar acquired his ear and feel for great-performing pickups such as those fitted to the Eastman T64/V-GB, opposite

In recent years, there's been an explosion in the number of independent pickup makers. Is it good or bad to have such widespread, granular competition?
"Well, I think it would be more difficult to start something new, now, with that many people out there. There are thousands of people making pickups – and I got into it at just the right time, you know? As far as

JASON LOLLAR PHOTO BY RICK DAHMS COURTESY OF LOLLAR PICKUPS

"I built about 50 guitars in the 80s, but the pickups became popular. By the 2000s I wasn't making instruments any more, I was just making pickups"

small pickup makers went, there was Lindy Fralin [who got started] a couple of years before I came out – we were about the same time – so there was me and Lindy and then TV Jones, who makes Gretsch Filter'Tron type stuff. But now it'd be really hard to stand out from everybody else.

"But I think it's helped the industry. I think what really opened it up was when places like the parts suppliers started

> "If you wind one pickup and come back and wind another, you want them to sound the same. It's hard to do"

selling pickups and advertising that they were selling pickups. I wrote a book about it [*For The Guitar Enthusiast, Basic Pickup Winding & Complete Guide To Making Your Own Pickup Winder*, 1999]; way back then it was the only book that showed the mechanical process of how to unspool the wire and how you could make a machine that would automatically wind it back and forth. We sold several thousand copies. I still hear people say today, 'I got started winding pickups because I read your book and realised that the mechanics are not that difficult.' There's other subtle things that are very difficult [when making pickups], but not the basics, like how to get the wire onto the bobbin."

When you get beyond those basics, what are the higher-order skills you need to master as a pickup maker?

"Whatever you're making, you want to make sure there's a consistency across all of that particular design. So if you wind one and come back a month later and wind another, you want them to sound almost exactly the same. It's hard to do and a lot of people don't really know how to achieve that. You have to know what affects the outcome and what doesn't – and it's really easy to fool yourself by comparing pickups in two different guitars. If you don't have the volume and tone pots all matched and the same amount of wire and everything, you're gonna get a variation just from that. You'll think, 'Oh, well, I wound this pickup this way, and this one that way, and this one sounds better than that one,' but it's actually just the pots. That gets overlooked a *lot*.

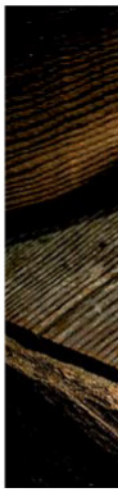
"Knowing what affects the outcome takes a while to understand. For example, one time we were getting weird results... There's a counter on our machines that shows how many winds are on it. Most of them I have now are digital counters, but these old ones were electromechanical and had gears in them. After you've wound 100,000 pickups on it, the gears will wear out, and then the numbers start just flipping around. So we were getting these weird results, like 'What's going on?' but we didn't realise the counter was stripped out. Eventually, I figured that out. So there's a variable right there you wouldn't necessarily think about.

"We have our wire made specially for a certain diameter because the industry, over the years, has made the diameter a little bit on the smaller side. To be [rated as] a certain gauge of wire, it has to fall in between two different numbers: one's a little lower, one's a little higher. But as long as it's in between that, it's supplied as that gauge [of] wire. So we have ours made slightly bigger, and they also change the formulation of insulation on the wire. Even the way the wire is laid makes a difference in how much output you get, how snarly the pickup is or how tight and percussive it is. If it's scattered more, you don't get as much output for the same amount of turns. So you can manipulate the outcome that way.

"There's also a lot of debate about whether woods in the guitar make any difference – believe it or not, it's hotly debated – so we have a whole wall of guitars. We have five or six Teles that are made on an alder body with a maple neck, for example, and we'll put pickups in them and we'll match the pots. Everything, electronically, is matched. We even adjust the pickup height with a scale so we can see how far they are [from the strings].

"We can match everything up, put new strings on both guitars – because just having old strings will make a difference in how it sounds. And, by the way, you can fool yourself into thinking, 'This pickup set sounds darker' because it's got old strings on it. So we do everything. A lot of times, there's still a difference in the sound and it's just the density of the guitar body. We have some guitars that are noticeably darker than others; everything else is the same. So that's another factor."

We've always thought your pickups have a subtle but tangible 'Lollar' feel and sound that you start to notice once you've played a few different designs. In your opinion, where does that come from?



1. Lollar's Imperial humbuckers fitted, in custom-wound form, to an Eastman Romeo semi

2. Novel blade-type pickups are among Lollar's latest designs

3. Lollar's Imperials can be spec'd over- or under-wound on request if that suits your needs

4. Lollar's J-Street bridge pickups are designed to balance well with a neck humbucker on a Tele

5. Fine details of construction are where the Lollar magic happens

"What I like is a pickup that will follow anything you put into it – it doesn't just smear your attack and have one sound all the time. You can get various sounds just by how hard you hit it, how light you touch, the gauge of string [you're using]... Some people like a pickup that just sounds like that pickup no matter what they throw at it. It's a little bit easier to control that way, but that's not what we're doing. We're looking for, like, a sports car kind of thing instead of a big truck. That would be the difference."

Your Imperial humbucker is widely regarded as one of the best PAF-style humbuckers out there. But since original PAFs varied in sound and output quite a lot, how do you choose what the archetypal PAF actually is?

"Yeah, that's why we make a few different versions of them [Imperial humbuckers] because some PAFs are a lot hotter than others. But back when I started, it was a lot easier to work on guitars that had PAFs in them. We were at Chicago Music Exchange with all of the sales team once and they had, I think, a 1960 or a '59 Sunburst just sitting on a couch and we grabbed it and took it into a room and played it... Most [PAFs in 'Bursts] have a particular point, when you dig in, where the treble kind of comes out and you can really hear the attack in the forefront more.

"But, occasionally... There's this YouTube channel, and I went down and visited those guys. They had a Goldtop that was a '57 and the bridge pickup had a really unique property to it, where it almost sounded like a cymbal when you hit it, you know? It was really strange. I've never figured out what made that particular pickup do that because I've never heard that before. Then the neck pickup just sounded like a typical PAF. So there are outstanding ones sometimes. The thing about that Goldtop bridge pickup is that it would probably annoy a lot of people, but for what it does, you could utilise it in some really unusual ways. It would not be for everybody, though, that's for sure.

"So, you know, typically PAFs are in a certain range, and that's what we made the Imperial to be. It's based on pickups that were wound in a medium output, rather than a higher one or a lower one – though we also make both of those [variations as options], too.

"A lot of the Gibson pickups that they used in archtops or hollowbodies are wound lower and I imagine they did that to minimise the low-end feedback. Less low-end coming out of the pickup is not going to couple with the guitar top as much and make that howling 'Whoo!' sound that hollowbodies can do."

WORKSHOP AND PICKUP PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOLLAR PICKUPS

5. Lollar Vintage T pickups were used in a *Guitarist* modding project a few issues back and have proven nuanced, clear and expressive in use

6. Flat-pole bridge pickups for Teles ready for shipping at Lollar. Jason Lollar's career began winding single-coil pickups, and 60s Strat pickups remain his favourite vintage inspiration

PICKUPS PHOTOCOURTESY OF LOLLARPICKUPS

One characteristic of the best pickups is the treble is always 'sweet' and never painful on the ear, which is really noticeable in your designs. What's that about?
"I have one ear that's really sensitive to a particular frequency – I think it's up around 3kHz or something in there – and if you overemphasise that particular frequency, it gives you what people call an 'ice-pick' kind of sound. I can hear it right away. It's like, 'That's not what I want at all. I don't want that type of treble.' It's got to be a little bit flatter, the response, not a big peak. And that has a lot to do with the way it's wound."

When you make pickups inspired by classic designs by vintage Fender or Gibson pickups, are you aiming for a precise replication or an evolved version?
"Well, that's a good point because that's what we try to do: build them *better* than they used to, not build them *like* they used to. Make them so they'll hold up even longer, so the Apocalypse will happen before most of our pickups ever take a dump [laughs]. But some of that has to do with simple things like how the lead wire has some strain relief on it. A lot of older pickups, if you just pulled on the lead wire, the whole thing would come apart: bang!

"In the Fender-type single coils they used to wind, they would dip the bobbin in lacquer after it was assembled, and that would insulate the magnets. But what happens on those, for one thing, the wire... as you put more turns on a coil, it increases the tension of the coil and it'll cut right through the lacquer and touch the magnet.

> "We try to build them *better* than they used to, not *like* they used to..."

There are little voids in the insulation on the main wire, so your coil is always going to be shorted out against one of the inside magnets when they're made that way. So we use super-thin insulating tape around it that eliminates all that.

"The other thing that happens on the Fender single coils is once you get sweat all over them, the poles start to corrode and then the corrosion goes down the polepieces into the coil and it breaks the coil and then your pickup's dead. But having tape around it, if they do corrode, the corrosion will be underneath a layer of tape, rather than right against the coil. So we take things like that into consideration. There are certain things we won't do because there's either no strain relief on the lead wire, or we know [a vintage pickup design] is bound to fail from a design flaw. So that's what we do."

What are your particular favourite pickups from the past?
"Oh, well, I like right before they sold Fender to CBS. Early to mid-60s. Those Strat pickups I like more than like a '54 or even a '59, and '59 is kind of a hotter pickup and they tend to be really spiky and ice-picky in comparison. That's my thing.

"The reason I started playing electric guitar was because I bought *Are You Experienced* by Hendrix. Also [songs such as] *Machine Gun* [on *Band Of Gypsys*]. All those kinds of sounds. Even Ritchie Blackmore, he was using a little bit later-built Strat that was a bit more gritty and snarly, but he was still able to get that sparkly, almost acoustic kind of sound."

Where is Lollar going next, design-wise?
"In the last year, we released a number of different designs. Now, we're into fulfilling orders. The R&D we've been doing for the last two years has slowed down a bit, but that'll come back around; we'll be developing something else. We came out with some really unusually responsive pickups, like a humbucker with Alnico poles in it – that thing, it's like driving a Formula 1 car, or what I imagine what that would be like. You barely increase your pressure on your pick and it's jumping – it'll go from super-clean and Fender-y sounding to way, way deep into hard output.

"We also did a similar thing with a double blade called the dB Humbucker. Which, because it's full of steel, really gives you a grind. The guys in High On Fire – a metal band – they love them. But they're not really a mellow pickup. They're very responsive and dynamic. Basically, what we're doing is trying to find a little bit more room for people to work."

For more info, see www.lollarguitars.com or, in the UK, www.guitargearpro.co.uk/pages/lollar-pickups

MF-484H 2.N

IT'S STILL A MOTHERF*CK!R.....

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BOUGHT & SOLD

TYLER BRYANT

The young bluesman tells tales of a brand-new signature guitar and an unbelievable deal on a 1960s Strat

Tyler's signature model is based on 'Pinky 2', a Shell Pink Relic Strat that replaced the first 'Pinky' guitar, which was stolen on tour in 2013 and recovered five years later

What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?

"The first nice guitar I bought was an Epiphone Les Paul. My parents realised I was obsessed with the guitar so they [also] purchased me a Stratocaster from this place called Mars Music in Plano, Texas, and from then on, I just wanted to have *all* of the guitars, you know?

"My first expensive guitar that I bought was a 1956 Gibson ES-125 and I still have it and I still use it all the time. I think it was about $1,000, which seemed like an incredible amount of money at the time. But I've had that guitar since I was 14 or 15 years old."

PHOTO BY OLIE MILLINGTON/REDFERNS

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"Well, the last guitar that I got was the second prototype for my signature [Custom Shop Tyler Bryant 'Pinky' Stratocaster] with Fender and it's such a dream come true for me to have a signature guitar, something with my name on it. It's a huge honour. It's a 60s 'C' neck, which is my favourite shape of neck and it's got a rosewood 'board. The pickups are two hand-wound 1960s-style single coils and a custom ShawBucker, designed by Tim Shaw. I just love the way that this configuration makes this guitar so versatile. I can achieve just about any sound with it and I use the humbucker almost like a secret weapon. It's not coil-tapped, I did not include that. I have guitars that have coil taps on and I don't ever really feel like I need it.

"The pickguard is hand-engraved by a friend of mine. Each one of them takes hours and hours to do so I'm happy that Fender was down to take the journey on that because I think it's always cool when you can have someone do something by hand, rather than just rely on a machine. The guitar comes set up how I like it with four springs in the back and vintage-style 60s-style hardware."

> "Whether it's a $200 or $10,000 guitar, you're gonna sound better on what you resonate with"

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've ever had when buying guitars?

"I feel like the ultimate deal for me was when I was 13 years old. I was playing at this club called Gilley's in Dallas, Texas, which is like a cowboy honky-tonk bar, and the coach of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team [Don Nelson] was there. No-one in this packed bar was paying attention to me playing with my blues band, except for this one guy. Afterwards, he went up to my mom, and he said, 'Hey, write down your address on this piece of paper.' He came up to me to say hello and he asked me what my dream guitar was, and I said a 1960s Fender Stratocaster. He said, 'Why don't you have one?' And I said, 'Well, they're like, $20,000, man.' And a few days later, one showed up at my house with a note that said, 'Play the hell out of this...' I still have that guitar and will always have that guitar. But that was, I guess, probably the best deal I ever got."

Have you ever sold anything that you've really regretted letting go?

"I did have a '62 SG Junior that I ended up selling to Bob Dylan's guitar tech. I've kicked myself for selling that one sometimes because that was the cleanest one I've ever seen. It sounded fantastic. And I sold a great 80s Epiphone Sheraton that I regretted selling as soon as I got the money for it. But you do these things sometimes."

TYLER'S GO-TO GEAR

"Currently, there's my arsenal of Strats and a few resonators that were made by a company called Mule [Resophonic] out of Saginaw, Michigan. Then I've been using a 50-watt hand-wired Orange head through a Marshall 4x12, one of the vintage-style straight cabinets, and a Tyler amp. They're based here in Nashville and they make incredible amps. It's like a hand-wired Princeton, essentially.

"As far as pedals go, my main overdrive pedal is called the TB Drive, made in Germany by a company called Rodenberg. Then for delay I've got the Universal Audio Galaxy and a Strymon TimeLine. I've got a tremolo called the Shakey Tremolo by Lovell [Musiclab], a SoloDallas Storm, and a Pharaoh fuzz by Black Arts Toneworks. I've got a DOD Gonkulator Ring Mod, a Jonny Octave by Zvex, a simple little JHS reverb pedal, an Electro-Harmonix POG, a Scott McKeon Octave Fuzz and a Dunlop 535Q [Cry Baby Multi-] Wah pedal."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've experienced?

"I bought this Japanese Foto Flame Stratocaster that I loved. I mowed so many yards to be able to save up my money to buy it and when I bought it, I took it home and I was like, 'This is a pretty Stratocaster, but this is not for me.' Then I thought that the Tom DeLonge signature Stratocaster was really cool when I was a kid and so I bought one of those in black. A couple days later, I was like, 'I don't think I love this. This guitar's for Tom, this is not for me,' you know?"

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

"I think my advice would be to feel the guitar for yourself and tune out everyone else's opinions. It's that old saying, 'One man's trash is another man's treasure.' I see guys like Jack Pearson running around Nashville with a Squier Stratocaster sounding better than just about any other player in town. You've just got to pay attention to what feels right and what you resonate with. Because whether it's a $200 guitar or a $10,000 guitar, you're gonna sound better on what you feel that you resonate with. So my advice would be to listen to that quiet voice in your head saying, 'That's my guitar.'"

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window, or browse online, and what were you looking at?

"I think the last time I went window shopping was at Carter Vintage Guitars here in Nashville. I have to be careful about doing the window shopping thing because I almost always end up spending money. The last time I went in with the idea, 'I'm gonna go check out and see what they have…' and I left with a 50s National Resophonic student-sized guitar!"

If you were forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?

"That is a tough one to answer. I'd probably have to say a good guitar and a cheap amp because the feel of the guitar is so important to me. But, man, that's tough for me because I think you're kind of damned if you do, damned if you don't. But I think because the guitar is just something I carry around even when it's not plugged in, just for my own sanity, that I would choose a good guitar. Just to be able to sit there and play a nice guitar would be satisfying enough, I suppose. But I do a lot of work in the studio and I've got a little battery powered Pignose that I use on records all the time and it seems fine."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would it be and why?

"I would probably choose the humbucker. And then I might go back on that thing I said earlier about not needing coil-tapping on any of my guitars… so I can have both. I use the humbucker the most for what I do and the thing that I love about the [ShawBucker] humbucker that's in my signature model is that it works well with the volume knob. So if I need to get a rounder, cleaner sound, then I can just dial the volume back and it seems to respond well." **[DM]**

Shake The Roots by Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown is out now on Rattle Shake Records. For more info on Tyler's signature, go to fendercustomshop.com **www.tylerbryantandtheshakedown.com**

The Limited Edition signature from Fender's Custom Shop in Aged Shell Pink features a two-piece alder body, maple neck with rosewood 'board, a pair of hand-wound 60s-style single coils and a ShawBucker in the bridge position. The intricate design on the aluminium pickguard is engraved by hand

PHOTO BY RYAN PIORKOWSKI

The MOD SQUAD

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Ever wondered if your new-to-you guitar is actually doing what it should? Dave Burrluck puts on his detective's cap and starts an investigation…

A common topic among new guitar owners is quality control, aka QC. We touched on this in our previous issue, but that was specifically about getting your new guitar to play and stay in tune. What happens if the guitar you've just acquired isn't actually to specification and/or the sounds it's supposed to make aren't what you're hearing?

Such an enquiry came from a player who'd purchased a Supro Tri Tone that was going for a good price, one of the later Indonesian-made reissues, not a relic from the vintage Valco years. He was enjoying the guitar, but there were a few quirks and he wondered if his guitar might have been mucked about with. He, too, had had some problems with tuning stability, which he'd fixed by slightly opening the nut's string grooves on the bass (wound string) side, and fitting a new set of strings.

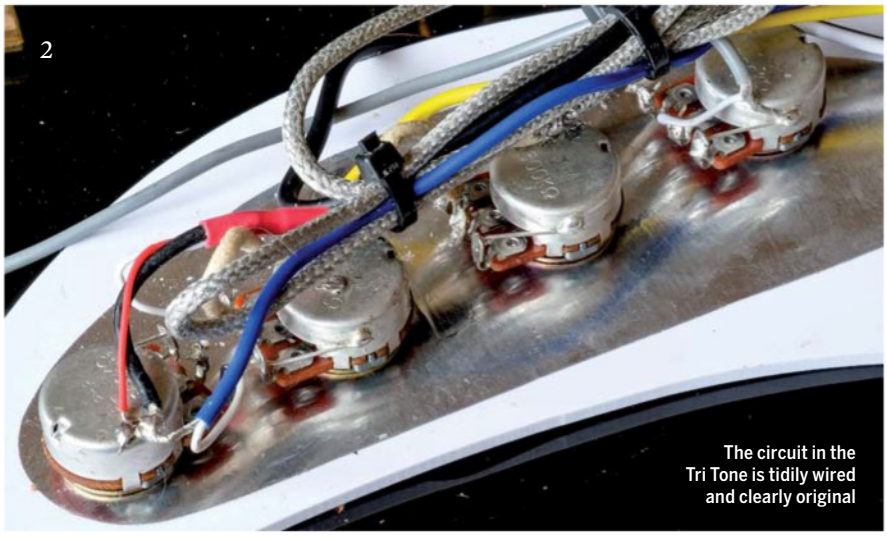
The odd thing was that although the guitar has *four* volume controls – one for each of its three pickups and a master volume for good measure – there is no tone control. However, to his ears it sounded like there *was* a tone control and that it was turned down a bit. Basically, he didn't think he was hearing what he should be: a pair of Supro Vistatone humbucking-sized single coils at the neck and middle, and a Super Alnico single coil (think sort-of P-90 in a humbucking size) at the bridge. "Single coils? They sound like humbuckers!" To cut a lengthy email dialogue short, he dropped off the guitar.

I'd reviewed a 1275JB Tri Tone, to give it its full name, along with a 1261AW Ozark and 1296 Silverwood, nearly four years ago back in issue 450 [pic 1]. Using an original 1968 Supro Stratford as a general reference, I'd said the following: "The Vistatone combines a very classic humbucker-like output with a surprisingly thick, wide sound; the Super Alnico at the bridge gives that a kick, a little more grit yet certainly isn't overbright. It's a huge alt-rock voice. The in-between sounds have a Strat-y character but again seem smoother and wider in response. Four volumes might be overkill, but you could easily alter that with a soldering iron."

I don't know whether it's because I've been listening to – and using – a lot of clear PAF-style pickups since that review, but I don't think my evaluation was too far off the mark, although, like the Tri Tone's owner found, these pickups really don't sound like single coils. So I totally get the 'tone control turned down' comment, not least that the strings are clearly pretty new – one player's 'smooth' might be another's 'dull'. Hmm.

Unplugged, there's pretty much the sort of sound you'd expect from an all-mahogany set-neck slab body style guitar, and compared with a new Yamaha Revstar Mk II Standard it is slightly less crisp with a little more lower-midrange push and a noticeably rich and long sustain. No alarm bells there. An obvious initial conclusion is that it's the pickups that are off, but then this is Supro world.

The Tri Tone uses two Vistatones at the neck and middle and a Super Alnico at the bridge. They look like humbuckers, but they're not!



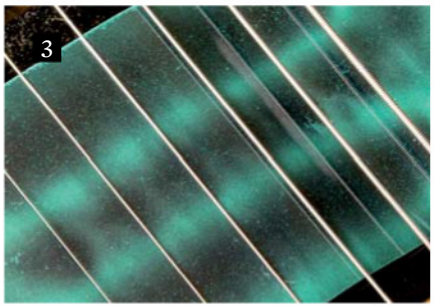
The circuit in the Tri Tone is tidily wired and clearly original

"When we discuss the 'sound' of a pickup, it's easy to overlook the influence of the guitar and its circuit"

First off, I take a look at the circuit and it's very obvious it hasn't been messed with [pic 2]. There's quite a bit of wire, which is all tidily held in place with some small tie-clips. Each pickup goes to its own Alpha 500k mini volume pot, then from each pot to the standard five-way lever switch, and the common output from that goes to the master volume, then to the output. Using EMG's magnetic viewing film held over the

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

Our Supro Tri Tone with its simplified circuit... and one hole still to fill!



3. EMG's magnetic viewing paper lets you see what's under the pickup cover as the film reacts to the magnetic fields and pole patterns

4. There's no obvious manufacturer ID, but you can see the unusual construction of the Vistatone through the spare holes in the brass baseplate

5. By installing a simple trial circuit you can begin to hear what the pickups should actually sound like

6. To wire a bypass switch, bridge the top two contacts: middle-left is from the selector switch, middle-right goes to the output jack. The lower contacts select the 'in'/left and centre 'out'/right lugs of the volume pot

pickups also confirms the unusual designs: the two Vistatones have a coil wound around those polepieces, but the actual magnet is placed to the opposite side; the Super Alnico [pic 3] seems to have a central coil and clearly shows a magnet to either side. Removing the pickups, the rear IDs are clearly marked, although where they're made and by whom isn't stated [pic 4]. And, if you didn't know, the DCRs would suggest they're humbuckers: 9.6kohms (bridge), 8.41k (middle) and 8.39k (neck). As ever, the DCR readings simply tell us the resistance of the coils, or in this case each single coil.

To conclude, then, it's pretty clear the guitar is working as is intended. But whether the rounded top-end is coming from the actual pickups, or indeed the loading from the combination of the individual volume plus the master volume, needs further investigation.

When we discuss the 'sound' of a pickup, it's easy to overlook the influence of the guitar it's on and the circuit it's a part of. You could assume the sound is *all* down to the pickups, swap them out – and don't forget we have three here – and then discover the circuit is obviously still affecting what you hear. Conversely, you could go to the trouble of changing the circuit, and perhaps the pot values, too, only to find that the 'round' sound is basically coming from the pickups themselves.

Let's See Action

Basically, I need to hear what the pickups sound like without that multi-volume control circuit. And, to be honest, does a three-pickup guitar actually need independent volume controls *and* a master volume? Using new components, I decide to wire the three pickups directly to a five-way lever switch, then from there to a simple master volume and tone, wired 50s-style, just like a Les Paul Junior. To ensure I can hear the *direct* sound of the pickups, I add a small DPDT mini-switch so I can route the signal either to the above control circuit or directly from the common output of the five-way switch to the output jack [pics 5 & 6]. It should be an interesting A/B experiment, too, between the tonal effect of a simple circuit such as this on the *actual* sound of the pickups.

And what a sound! Listening with the mini selector switch going direct to the output, the two Vistatones aren't transformed, but that sweet high-end is back – as if I'd turned a standard tone control fully up – and the unbridled Super Alnico is powerful with Les Paul Junior-like sizzle. Switching in the master volume/master tone circuit, however, I'm slightly surprised because, really, there is no audible difference. As ever, I listen through various amps – but, no, I can't hear anything.

TONAL VIEW

Back in issue 417 I spoke with Ken Calvet at Roadhouse Pickups who had recreated these designs for the then-new Supro range, centring on what is now known as the Vistatone and is used in the neck and bridge positions of our Tri Tone.

They were originally designed by Ralph Keller back in the 1950s, a 'lost' name of the pickup world, although specifically his 'Vistatone' design was patented in 1954 and cited by Seth Lover in his 'PAF' patent. The pickup also appeared on many Valco-made brands such as National, Airline and Silvertone.

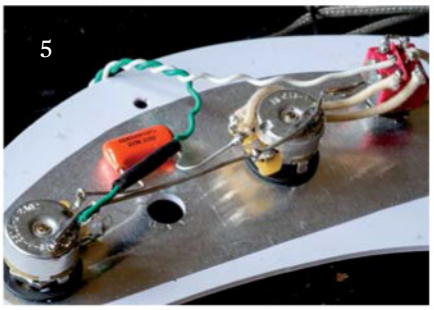
"Its unique construction has a very direct impact on its tone, feel and interaction with the strings, namely what happens when you hit it hard," explained Ken. "Having the magnet off to the side [adjacent to the coil] and with its axis perpendicular to the coil sets up a unique magnetic field. The strings are moving through the magnetic field off to the side of magnet, rather than directly over it as in the Fender single coil or the P-90. Asymmetrical as opposed to symmetrical. The magnetic flux is directed through the coil via its baseplate and screw poles on one end of the magnet and a keeper plate on the other (far) end. The result is an overall magnetic field that has a large sensing area and, since it is on its side, is not particularly strong or in better words 'stiff'. It's a very touch-sensitive pickup with a rather large range of capabilities."

CIRCUIT DIAGRAMS

Thanks to the internet you should be able to find virtually any wiring diagram easily. Plenty of manufacturers have their own diagrams for current and older circuits, not least Fender and PRS. Pickup makers, certainly the larger ones like Seymour Duncan, DiMarzio, Fralin and Bare Knuckle, have plenty of info and circuits on their own websites. Then there are parts suppliers, such as Six String Supplies, who have some really clearly drawn diagrams, too. There are plenty more.

There are numerous guitar parts suppliers who stock the pots, switches (including the small mini-toggle DPDT types), capacitors and resistors, wire and so on, and they're usually much easier to navigate than more specific electronic supply stores. As ever, Armstrong Music (formerly WD Music UK) provides very fast service and has kept The Mod Squad supplied on numerous occasions.

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK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What is patently clear, however, is that the original circuit on the Tri Tone was the culprit and noticeably chokes the high-end. Effectively, and in basic terms, because each pickup goes directly to its own volume control and then to that master volume (wired in parallel), the pickups are 'seeing', nominally, 250kohms (the actual readings range between 234k and 257k because the pots aren't exactly 500k). With the new simple circuit, the pickups are now seeing 544kohms according to the Mod Squad's multimeter, slightly lower than the nominal 550k value of the CTS pots I'd fitted.

Further Thoughts

Now that I've got to the bottom of this dilemma, it's another example of how important your control circuit – the component values and how it's wired – is in terms of what we hear. As importantly, it illustrates that the best pickups in the world can be 'tuned' in terms of their final sound at the output jack, positively or negatively, with some simple experimentation.

Using a simple DPDT switch as a direct output 'bypass' is not just useful to hear the effect (or not) of a control circuit. You could just as easily experiment with different tone capacitor types or values, for example, and on a guitar such as this Tri Tone any wiring mods or ideas are easy thanks to the separate control plate. Food for thought! G

ON GUARD

Say goodbye to taping up your fingerboard with a new full-face protector. A gizmo too far or a worthy addition to your tool kit?

This modding lark ain't cheap and I don't just mean the price of those high-end, hand-wound pickup sets you plan to install. The more jobs you tackle, invariably, the more specialist tools you might need. And rather like those pedals you thought were a good idea at the time (and now sit in your gear locker), specialist tools might rarely get used. Then again, slowly building up your tool set – even if you plan to do no more than maintain, fix and mod your own guitars – is, for many, all part of our hobby.

For example, the latest addition to MusicNomad's increasingly broad range of tools and guitar care products, which are aimed at everyone from kitchen-table modders to full-time guitar makers, is the Fret Shield Fretboard Protector Guard, a 0.008-inch thick piece of stainless steel designed to drop over your fingerboard to protect it while you carry out any fret fettling, where previously you'd have used tape to protect the face of the fingerboard.

> "Masking tape can pull off old, cracked finish when you remove it, especially if it's a thin nitro"

The guard comes in five common scale-length variations: 25.5, 24.75 and 25 inches, plus one for the actual Gibson scale length that's equivalent to 24.57 inches and then 25.34 presumably for guitars with a Martin-style 'long' scale. Each has universal 3.18mm wide slots for thin-to-jumbo-sized fretwire. The 25.5 and the 25-inch guards have 24 fret slots; the others have 22, with the exception of that 25.34-inch scale guard that has 20.

What's wrong with good ol' masking tape? Well, it's a bit of a faff to apply, not least if you have to cut it down in size to fit between the higher frets. And even if you remember to use a low-tack type – or just reduce the adhesion by sticking the tape down and pulling it off a few times – there's a chance it might pull off old, cracked finish when you remove it, especially if it's a thin nitro. It can leave little bits of sticky residue on the neck, too: rarely a problem, but more to clean up.

Of course, you don't always need to tape up a fingerboard while you're levelling, recrowning and fettling fret ends, especially a standard rosewood or similar 'board, but when you start fine-sanding or final fret polishing with a metal polish it's good practice, and it's at this point that you'd most likely employ the Fret Shield. Quite often, even on a new guitar, those latter processes are all you need to do.

The full-face Fret Shield simply drops over your frets and is secured with the supplied elastic bands in a seconds. A quick rub with 0000 wire wool or similar, followed by a buff with metal polish, is fast and you know the fingerboard is protected. Doing exactly that on a new Epiphone and a slightly older Guild Aristocrat P90, along with a string change, had both guitars feeling and playing superbly in a very short time.

So, while the Fret Shield considerably speeds up preparation time compared with using tape, for the occasional user £58 per Shield seems quite a luxury, particularly if you need to work on guitars of differing scale lengths. For anyone doing this lark professionally, however, each guard will soon pay for itself and, even as a more occasional user myself, now that I've used one, the thought of going back to masking tape is something I don't fancy much.

You'll find plenty more info on the Fret Shield and a host of other products at MusicNomad.com, as well as some good resources to help you hone your setup skills. Definitely worth a visit. G

The Fret Shield in action: it makes a smooth-and-polish fret job ridiculously fast

That should give you something to think about till our next issue. In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.

Huw Price's **Nitty Gritty**

Even with a tasty valve amp and the best drive pedal, we all need a boost now and then

Boost Units

If you ever get the chance to play through an early guitar amp, such as a 1930s Gibson EH-185 or a late-1940s V-Front Fender Dual Professional, you may be surprised by the ferocity of the overdrive they can generate. Combining them with an early Goldtop Les Paul reveals that proto-metal guitar tones would have been achievable as early as 1952.

There are various reasons that these early amps break up so quickly, but a key factor is the way the input sockets are connected to the grid of the first preamp valve. The ES-185's microphone input, and all the V-Front inputs, are directly coupled to the grid and there are no grid stopper resistors. These resistors became the norm during the early 1950s and they're used to prevent radio frequency interference. But they also dump a fair bit of the guitar signal to ground before it even reaches the valve and they reduce treble. To hear how a cranked Fender V-Front sounds, check out ZZ Top's *Antenna*.

By the time rock 'n' roll was morphing into blues-rock, most amp manufacturers had spent the previous 15 years or so cleaning up their acts. Players needed overdrive and sustain to sound like Clapton and Bloomfield, and they couldn't achieve that by running a set of single coils into an AC30 or Twin Reverb. Guitarists soon discovered that bumping up the guitar signal before it reached the amp input ensured crunch would be served and their amps would saturate with harmonic overtones. Some players employed tape echo preamps, such as the Wem Copicat and Roland Space Echo.

Others, including Jimmy Page and Eddie Van Halen, favoured the Echoplex, which derived from Ray Butts' Echosonic amplifier design. Ritchie Blackmore was partial to the sound of his AIWA TP-1011 tape recorder, but during the 60s players wanted more compact and convenient solutions – and the era of the treble booster dawned.

Brit Boost

The treble booster really started out as a British phenomenon. The records that UK rockers and blues players were listening to were mostly recorded in the US with bright-sounding Fender amps, but on this side of the pond the Vox AC30 ruled the roost. They had their own classic tone, but even The Shadows found them a bit dark and murky compared with Fenders.

Eventually, Vox relented and developed a Top Boost version of the AC30. The company also marketed modules that could be retrofitted to earlier amps, which opened up the treble and increased gain. But in 1965 Dallas Music Ltd came up with another solution and its Rangemaster Treble Booster was widely adopted by players such as Rory Gallagher, Tony Iommi, Billy Gibbons and Ritchie Blackmore. Rory even showed Brian May how to use one.

Rory and Brian never stopped using theirs, but the most famous recording that's associated with the Rangemaster may not have featured one at all. Thus far we have studiously avoided mentioning god, or rather Eric Clapton, as he's more commonly known these days. The presence of a Rangemaster on John Mayall's 'Beano' album is still hotly debated, but the consensus now seems to be that Eric plugged his 1960 'Burst straight into his KT66-driven Marshall JTM45 and turned everything up full.

Dallas Music's Rangemaster Treble Booster became a hit among mid-60s guitarists including Rory Gallagher, whose personal unit is pictured here

Boosterism

The Rangemaster wasn't a pedal as such, and was designed to be placed on top of an amp. With a sliding on/off switch on the front panel, a single volume control and a hard-wired cable for connecting to an amp, the Rangemaster had a simple circuit that featured a single gain stage courtesy of a Mullard OC44 germanium transistor.

The circuit combined bass roll-off with a maximum boost of 24dB. This boost isn't flat across the frequency range and when you play a low E, the fundamental frequency remains unboosted and the treble boost becomes more apparent higher up the neck.

The germanium transistor was biased close to its cut-off point, which causes the signal to compress more on one side of the waveform than the other. This imparts a smooth asymmetric overdrive that progresses into distortion when higher signal levels cause the transistor to cut off.

The Rangemaster's output impedance is much lower than a passive guitar circuit and is effectively set by the value of the 10k output potentiometer. It's suggested that this causes the first preamp valve to overdrive in a smoother way and, all things considered, the Rangemaster is a highly coloured boost, rather than a clean boost.

Back Boost

With the vintage focus firmly fixed on guitars and amps, it is undeniable that treble boosters have been somewhat airbrushed from history. They were a crucial ingredient

for countless classic guitar sounds, but as pickups became hotter, amp builders started incorporating high-gain preamps and pedal companies such as Ibanez and Boss developed convincingly amp-like overdrives, most players decided that treble boosts had become redundant.

Nowadays, massive amps with switchable clean and high-gain channels seem almost as passé as Rangemasters. Those who still rely on amps rather than modellers may be more inclined towards small valve combos for classic overdrive at practical volume levels. It's even more common to use a bigger valve amp with plenty of clean headroom as a pedal platform for a variety of overdrive and distortion flavours.

As the tables turned, boost pedals started to make a comeback, and a boost is now a standard feature on most pedalboards. It's worth distinguishing between vintage-style boosts that add specific tonal colouration,

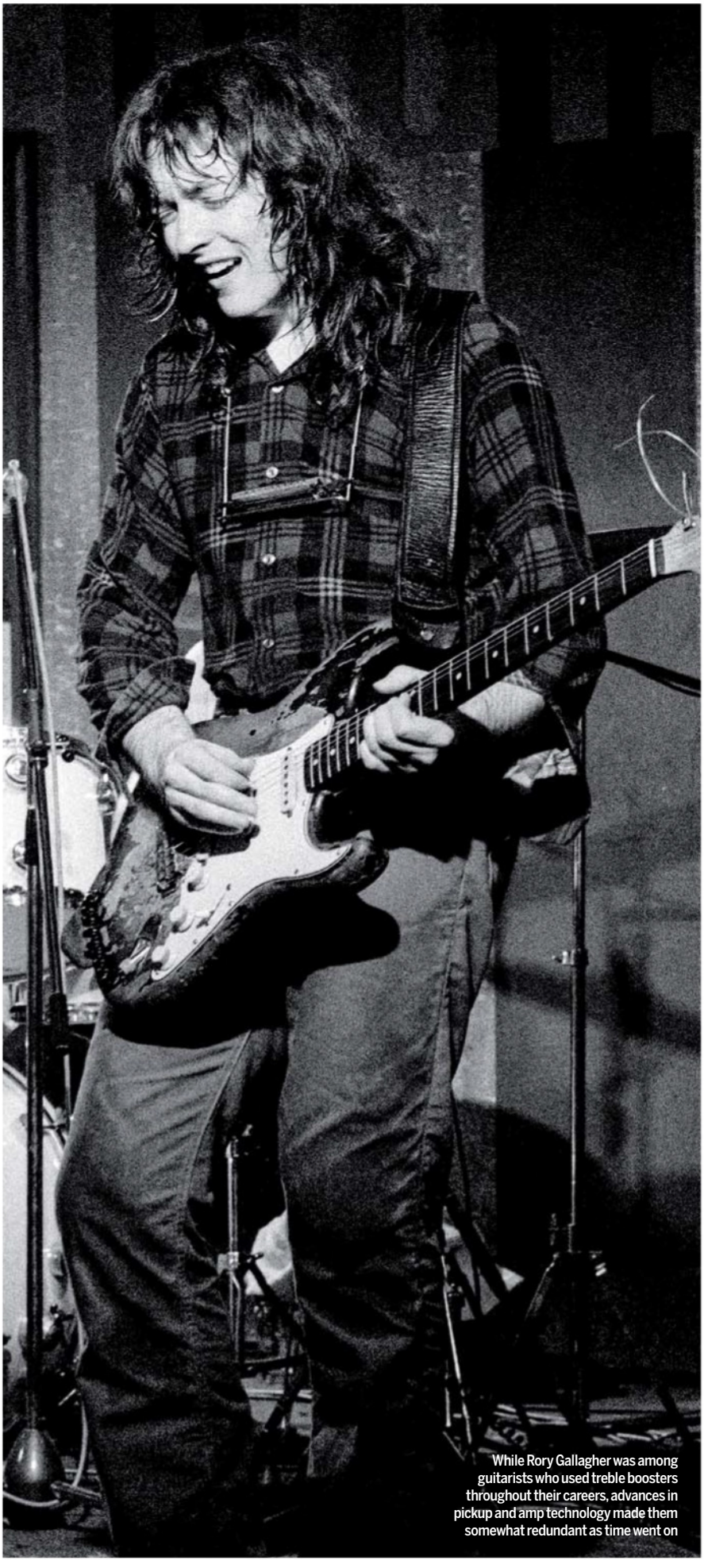
Vintage-style boosts add tonal colouration and modern clean boost circuits are intended to lift levels

and more modern clean boost circuits that are intended to lift levels without altering the sonic character. Many of these employ op-amps and JFETs, rather than archaic germanium transistors, to achieve a nominally flat frequency response.

Some players use boosts to even up the volume when swapping between guitars with differing output levels. A boost can also be used to provide a lift for soloing without adding overdrive or distortion to the tone, but much depends on the amp's headroom. And then, of course, you can hit the front of an already overdriving amplifier with a clean boost to bring out more of its natural overdrive characteristics.

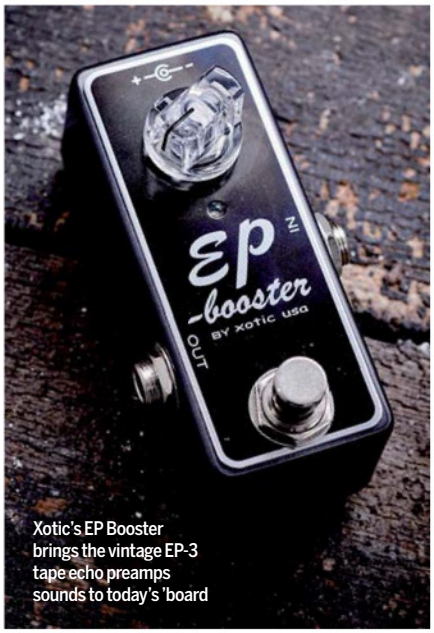
If your amp has an effects loop, you can try placing your clean boost there. It can function as a footswitchable master volume or it can help to push the power valves into overdrive while allowing the preamp to remain clean or semi dirty.

If you're someone who prefers the vintage tone and touch response of low-wind



While Rory Gallagher was among guitarists who used treble boosters throughout their careers, advances in pickup and amp technology made them somewhat redundant as time went on

PHOTO BY JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



Xotic's EP Booster brings the vintage EP-3 tape echo preamps sounds to today's 'board

Over its various incarnations, Ibanez's Tube Screamer has provided more than just its signature drive

pickups but also need to push an amp into overdrive, simply activate a boost and leave it switched on. You can get the best of both worlds and it will open up a wider range of tones that can be enjoyed simply by using your volume control. Think of it like turning your guitar up to 11, or 12 or 15...

Stack Attack

With multiple pedals on your 'board, should your boost go before or after your overdrive? There's no definitive answer to this and much depends on what you prefer, what you're trying to achieve and the type of boost you're using. If you're using a boost to get a volume lift or to push an amp into overdrive, then it's probably best placed towards the end of your signal chain. You can set the overdrive for your meat-and-potatoes powerchord tone and then use the boost to provide extra poke for soloing. A clean boost will retain the tone of any overdrive placed before it, or you can use a more coloured boost to shape the tone into something clearer and more defined for lead playing.

When placed in front of an overdrive pedal, the boost will force the overdrive into added compression and clipping. But compared with placing the boost post-overdrive, the level increase will almost certainly be lower. On the plus side, the extra compression and drive can smooth things out and you should achieve extra fatness and sustain.

> Some use boosts to even up the volume when swapping between guitars with differing output levels

A compressor placed after a boost pedal in your signal chain will counteract much of the level increase, but you can achieve crazy sustain in that '*Another Brick*' sort of way. Stacking pedals is fun, but look for pedals that complement one another tonally and experiment to find a running order that brings out the best of both without adversely affecting noise levels.

Boost Buying

Relatively few Rangemasters were manufactured and originals now command serious money. Affordable vintage options include the Vox/Jen Treble/Bass Booster, Electro-Harmonix Screaming Bird Treble Booster and Schaller Treble Bass Boost. Orange and John Hornby Skewes made treble boosts, too.

Fortunately, modern versions are widely available, with The British Pedal Company making an extremely accurate replica. BSM offers Rangemaster repros in various flavours, and Analog Man's Beano Boost and Hello Sailor's versions both provide additional tone-shaping features.

Those who are interested in building their own pedals will find plenty of Rangemaster kits out there and they make great beginner's projects. It's also simple enough to scratch-build one using a tag strip, like the originals, but OC44 transistors can be expensive and you may need to try a few before finding a really good one. Clean boost kits are also widely available.

Some overdrive pedals produce excellent results when used to boost. Classic examples include the Klon Centaur and Ibanez Tube Screamer, along with countless clones based on those circuits. The trick is setting the drive/gain control low and the level high, with the tone control taming the treble or adding clarity as needed.

If you prefer more extensive tone-shaping with your boost, options include the Orange Two Stroke, MXR Timmy and Chase Bliss Audio Condor. At the other extreme, popular one-knob boosts include the MXR Micro Amp and Electro-Harmonix LPB-1. And for classic tape echo preamp tones without the bulk and hassle, check out the Echoplex-flavoured Xotic EP-3 and Catalinbread Epoch Boost or the Space Echo-inspired Nocturne Dynobrain BS-301. G

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Transatlantic Tastes

Is the concept of British versus American speaker voicings out of date? Or just plain confusing? Paul Gough of Zilla Cabs offers his view

Stereotypes are largely something to be avoided. Even identifying general trends requires context, but in the speaker world we often refer to two groups: American- and British-voiced speakers. This issue, we'll look at whether this is a lazy identifier and if we can add some meat to the bone instead.

I'm from the North of England, and although I do like pigeons, I don't have a whippet or a flat cap. We've all seen marketing campaigns where 'Britishness' invokes imagery of a three-piece suit, bowler hat and a cup of tea, while the American side has a cowboy hat and someone trying not to fall off an angry cow. If we translate this stereotype to speakers, and therefore music, it means British speakers must be great for classical music and US-made speakers great for country. But there has to be more to it than this. Granted, I may be pushing things a little bit to make a point here, but I bet I'm not too far off what many of you were thinking, and I don't think our description of American and British voicing of speakers walks a wholly different path, either.

I think the two perceptions of different voicings come, like a lot of things in guitar, from the early days of the late 50s and 60s, and to break things down even further, from Marshall and Fender. When I'm made to think of the two voicings, my understanding is that the American side essentially means a Fender combo-type sound. Now, that is a big enough envelope in itself, but in general terms I think of a more open, ambient sound, not too focused on the low-end and a bit more 'twangy' (unless you're *Stranger Things*' Eddie Munson, you don't tend to play thrash metal on a silver-panel combo). The British-voiced speakers, meanwhile, are ones we'd most likely find in a 4x12.

What can muddy the waters further is when brands that are mostly known for manufacturing British-voiced speakers make their own American-voiced speakers, marketed as great for a Fender combo. Likewise, there can be confusion when companies known for more American-voiced speakers make British-voiced speakers that are essentially their take on the Celestion Greenback, the most British speaker of them all.

The next part is something I am a little guilty of, too. When I think of Fender combos, and therefore more American-toned/voiced speakers, I mostly think of Jensen speakers because these are what Fender predominantly used. This isn't to say I don't love EVs and JBLs in a Fender combo – they are up there with my favourites – but Jensen is a well-known supplier of speakers to Fender and has been for years. The company is also well known for a range of speakers that are perfect for more vintage tones. The fact is, there are models that are so good in their own right, they don't deserve to be pigeonholed – they are just really good.

The bit that can be problematic is if we start to associate these loose trends of American-voiced speakers with American-*made* speakers. The main issue here is that I find a large proportion of modern American-made speakers sound darker than their UK equivalents, which in itself is not a problem – they can sound really good. But if we start to blur our ideas of American-voiced speakers being open-sounding and more well suited to slightly brighter guitar sounds with what we think American-made speakers should sound like, then we could start to find ourselves getting in some trouble, tonally speaking.

> "The perceptions of different voicings come, like a lot of things in guitar, from the late 50s and 60s"

Not to throw too big a spanner in the works, but my favourite replacement speakers for a Fender Twin are the Celestion G12-65 and the Fane A90, both UK-made speakers, which demonstrates that mixing two very British-voiced speakers in an iconic American amp can result in something very pleasing and something that even I may have been put off from doing as on paper I should have started with something quite different.

This all leads me to think we should use the idea of British- and American-voiced speakers a little less than we probably do. After all, Jensens are made in Italy, and some of Celestion's biggest-selling speakers are made in China, as are the majority of speaker chassis and magnets – despite the number of speaker-component manufacturers worldwide. G

Blackstar's Artisan 30 is loaded with a pair of classic British speakers, Celestion's Vintage 30s, giving a certain voice to its owner Richard Hawley's rig

"It can be problematic if we start to associate these loose trends of American-voiced speakers with American-made speakers"

The lines between British- and American-voiced speaker sounds get blurred when we look at how the speakers are used and their places of manufacture

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL GOUGH

Rod Brakes' Classic Gear

The 1950s Bassman combo designs laid the groundwork for countless guitar amps

Fender 'Tweed' Bassman

As its name implies, the Fender Bassman was designed with the electric bass in mind – specifically, the Precision Bass – though it has been wholeheartedly adopted by guitarists. Indeed, Fender's current '59 Bassman LTD amp is aimed at the six-string market, featuring in the 'Guitar Amplifiers' section of its website.

This 45-watt reissue-style amp harks back to the game-changing 5F6-A circuit (one of many versions the Bassman has appeared in since its 1952 introduction) that was the basis of Marshall's 1962 debut JTM45 amps. Although these designs are extremely similar in terms of electronics, Marshall's 12-inch Celestion-loaded, closed-back speaker cabinets create a markedly different sound to the quad of 10-inch Jensens found in 1950s open-back Bassman combos. But the Bassman's set of Jensen P10R speakers (superseded by the P10Q in 1959) is a far cry from its original single 15-inch Jensen format.

Soon after the groundbreaking Precision Bass appeared in 1951, Fender developed its partner amplifier. Initially, the 18-watt 1x15 Pro-Amp was the most powerful amp in the line able to be called upon for bass duties, but the Bassman appeared the following year with an original design that included a bass-friendly ported back panel and 26 watts of power. Sporting a single channel with two inputs along with volume and tone controls, this 5B6 circuit Bassman was originally decked out in the 'TV front' style of tweed amps and changed to the 'wide panel' style in '53. In both instances, the chassis was mounted to the bottom of the cabinet, attached to the top-mounted control panel by an 'umbilical cord' of wire.

In late 1954, Fender redesigned the Bassman and introduced some major improvements with the 'narrow panel' 5D6 version. This ushered in not only the 4x10 layout but also a fixed bias output stage – meaning greater headroom and a clearer-sounding bottom-end – and dual rectification, courtesy of a pair of 5Y3GT rectifier valves. Early the following year, the 5E6 version appeared sporting dual 5U4GA rectifier valves. These twin-channel (Normal and Bright) amps feature an extended control array comprising knobs labelled 'Presence', 'Bass', 'Treble', 'Volume-1' and 'Volume-2'. By this stage, Fender openly recognised the Bassman's appeal to guitar players, as the 1955 catalogue attests: "Provides true bass amplification or may also be used for other instruments due to its widely varying tonal character." (It's worth noting the same catalogue entry advertises the Bassman as having "50 watts" of power, although various sources, including Fender, quote the power rating as 40 and 45 watts).

> Soon after the groundbreaking Precision Bass appeared in 1951, Fender developed its partner amplifier

In 1957, the 5F6 Bassman version heralded the arrival of yet another significant development in guitar-amplifier design with the long-tailed-pair phase inverter, further enhancing the amp's power, depth and clarity. At the same time, a Middle tone knob was added to the control panel along with two inputs per channel. Meanwhile, a single 83 rectifier valve was installed, and the long-standing 6L6 power valves were superseded by dual 5881s. Featuring a GZ34 rectifier valve, the highly influential 5F6-A circuit appeared in 1958, representing what many people consider to be the zenith of the tweed-era Fender Bassman.

The original Fender script logo nameplate on Rory's 'narrow panel' Bassman was replaced by a block logo one as featured on the earlier 'TV front' and 'wide panel' amps

The Evolution of the Fender 'Tweed' Bassman

1952
Fender Bassman released; 5B6 version; tweed covering; 'TV front'; 26 watts; 1x15; single channel

1953
'Wide panel' cabinet

1954
5D6 version; 'narrow panel' cabinet; "50 watts" (advertised); 4x10; dual channel (Normal and Bright)

1955
5E6 version; 5U4GA rectifier valves

1957
5F6 version; 4x inputs (2 per channel); Middle added to Treble and Bass controls; 83 rectifier valve

1958
5F6-A version; GZ34 rectifier valve

1959
Rubber 'dog bone' handle replaces leather type

1960
Discontinued

1990
Reissue Series '59 Bassman

Current
'59 Bassman LTD

Rory Gallagher's 1955 Fender Bassman

CIRCUIT
5E6 version; 4x10 speaker configuration (two Jensen P10R/two replacements); "50 watts" (advertised); valves: two 5U4GA, two 6L6GB, one 12AX7 and two 12AY7; modded with mains transformer

CONTROLS
Five black plastic chickenhead knobs labelled 'Presence', 'Bass', 'Treble', 'Volume-1' and 'Volume-2' (left to right)

POWER & CONNECTIONS
Ground switch; fuse; power switch; standby switch; red pilot light jewel; two inputs labelled 'Bright' and 'Normal' (two channels)

CABINET
Pine; narrow panel; 23 ½ (W) by 22 5/8 (H) by 10 ½ inches (D); Baltic birch baffle board and two-piece dual-ported back (lower section missing); top/rear control panel cutout

ORNAMENTATION
Chrome control panel with white font; tweed cover; brown grille cloth (replacement); metal nameplate with Fender block logo (replacement)

David Davidson's Vintage Icons

This mysterious guitar features a unique finish and an unusually large neck profile

1968 'Greenburst' Gibson ES-335

This 335 was shipped to the same music store as a custom-ordered 'greenburst' Epiphone Riviera

"This is a really neat Gibson ES-335. It's a '68 by serial number and features a green-to-yellow sunburst. At Well Strung Guitars, we just call the finish 'Greenburst' – I sent some pictures to Gibson, and they had no idea what to call it, either! The sides of the guitar are a very deep green/black colour. I say 'green/black' because from a certain angle it looks black, though it's actually a very dark green. But the finish is translucent, and if you look closely, you can see the grain through it. The same translucent colour is also on the back of the neck.

"Another interesting thing is that it's never had a label [normally visible through the bass-side f-hole]. It was never there. Under black light [ultraviolet light] you'd see remnants of the glue. But there's nothing. It says 'custom' on the truss rod cover, and it has an unusually large neck. The nut width is still the narrower [1 9/16-inch] type of the period, but this guitar's neck is unusually deep. As you get past the 5th fret, it feels large. That makes me think it must have been made for someone specifically, like many of the rare custom instruments we have here. I don't think it was a trade-show piece because they probably wouldn't have used a neck like this. It's in the special-order log at Gibson – which confirms it was a special order, obviously – but there's nothing else written in there except the serial number and model number. It doesn't say anything about the colour or specs at all!

"However, I was told by Gibson that there was a music shop in the United States

> "There was a music shop owned by a lady who was in love with the colour green"

owned by a lady who was in love with the colour green. And every year, she ordered a custom instrument for herself. What makes this compelling is that I also have an interesting green [Epiphone] Riviera – which would also be a great guitar to feature here at some point! This Riviera is also a transparent green. It's not a Royal Olive finish, which some readers may have heard of – it's just a kind of murky, transparent green guitar with a dark finish on the back of the neck, like this ES-335. I've never seen a dark-green neck like this, aside from on the two guitars I'm talking about.

"Like the Gibson guitar here, the Epiphone Riviera was recorded in the factory's special-order log, except in this case the entry *does* mention the colour green, not a specific shade, just 'green'. We can also confirm it was sent to this woman's music store in 1967. This ES-335 is a 1968 model and was shipped to the same music store. Was it made for her personally? It's hard to say. It's possible she didn't have big enough hands to enjoy this neck. I mean, it's unusual, particularly for the time period. Most 1968 Gibsons have tiny necks. This one is huge.

"Aside from the finish, neck and missing label, it features the standard ES-335 specs of the time. It has a trapeze tailpiece, nylon saddles and two T-top humbucking pickups – the pickups sound great! And it has the short scratchplate, chrome hardware and double-ring/double-line Kluson tuners. That's all standard stuff, but the rest of it is very unique. It's pretty neat. And that's always been my great love – seeking out strange guitars.

"We recently shared some images of another 335 we have at Well Strung Guitars that features a kind of 'iced tea' 'burst and [an Epiphone] Casino fretboard [with parallelogram inlays]. I bought that 1969 guitar because I thought it was cool. I realise there is more than one of them because Gibson was using up their Epiphone stock in the late 60s before production moved overseas. But it's always been my thing to find such strange instruments.

"I've just got a cool Burns guitar that came into the store – a prototype that is a freak of nature. I mean, I've never seen anything like it before. It's got three Tri-Sonic pickups and a Strat-style solid body with the pickups mounted to the pickguard. It also has three hardware-store-quality three-way toggle switches on it. It's a very prehistoric build. You don't often get to see UK-built stuff like that here in the US. There were a lot of really great British guitars and amps that never made it over here. So it's cool that I can share some of these US rarities with you guys." **[RB]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563

Aside from its highly unusual finish and neck profile, this unlabelled 335 sports all the standard specs of a '68 model

PHOTOS BY PAIGE DAVIDSON

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Slow Gospel Blues

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Lewis Pequeño Bastardo, Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 15 mins per example

ANOTHER TITLE I would like to have used here would be something like 'Slow Major Gospel Blues With Off-Grid Timing And Lots Of Other Blues Trademarks'... But that, quite understandably, wouldn't have made it past the editors. Nevertheless, you will find all these things in the example solo. There are a few tips of the hat to John Mayer, Stevie Ray Vaughan and BB King among others, but I'm not attempting to emulate anyone in particular.

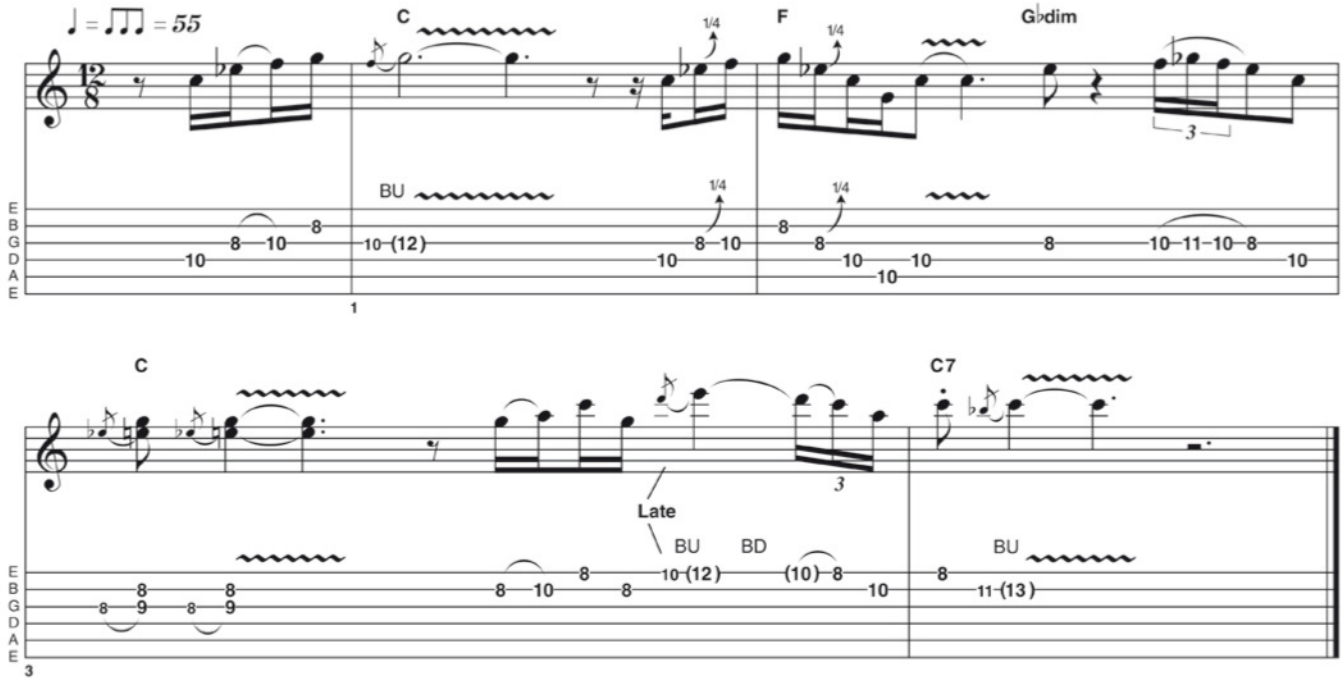
Let's talk about some of the blues 'trademarks' mentioned earlier. Many of these phrases occupy a space between major and minor. This is achieved by sliding or trilling between the minor and major 3rd (E♭ to E in this key), or pushing/pulling that minor 3rd. It's transcribed as a quarter-tone bend for clarity, but this shouldn't be taken too literally; 'slightly sharp' would be more accurate but would take up too much space! Note that this approach also 'bends' the minor pentatonic to fit over major chords. Combining this with the 6th (A in this key of C) really gives phrases a BB King vibe.

Next, let's look at phrasing and timing. If you follow the transcription while listening to the audio, you'll notice there is a real sense of pulling back against the tempo – or, put another way, playing behind the beat. I call this 'off-grid' timing as it doesn't conform to a regimented four, eight or 12 (and so on) to the bar metric. As with quarter-note bends, there is only so much information a transcription can give without becoming incredibly complex – and defeating the object of sounding laid-back! For this reason, I've 'quantized' the notated rhythms to the nearest beat and specified 'late' underneath. Hope you enjoy and see you next time. G

Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from ***www.richardbarrettguitar.com***

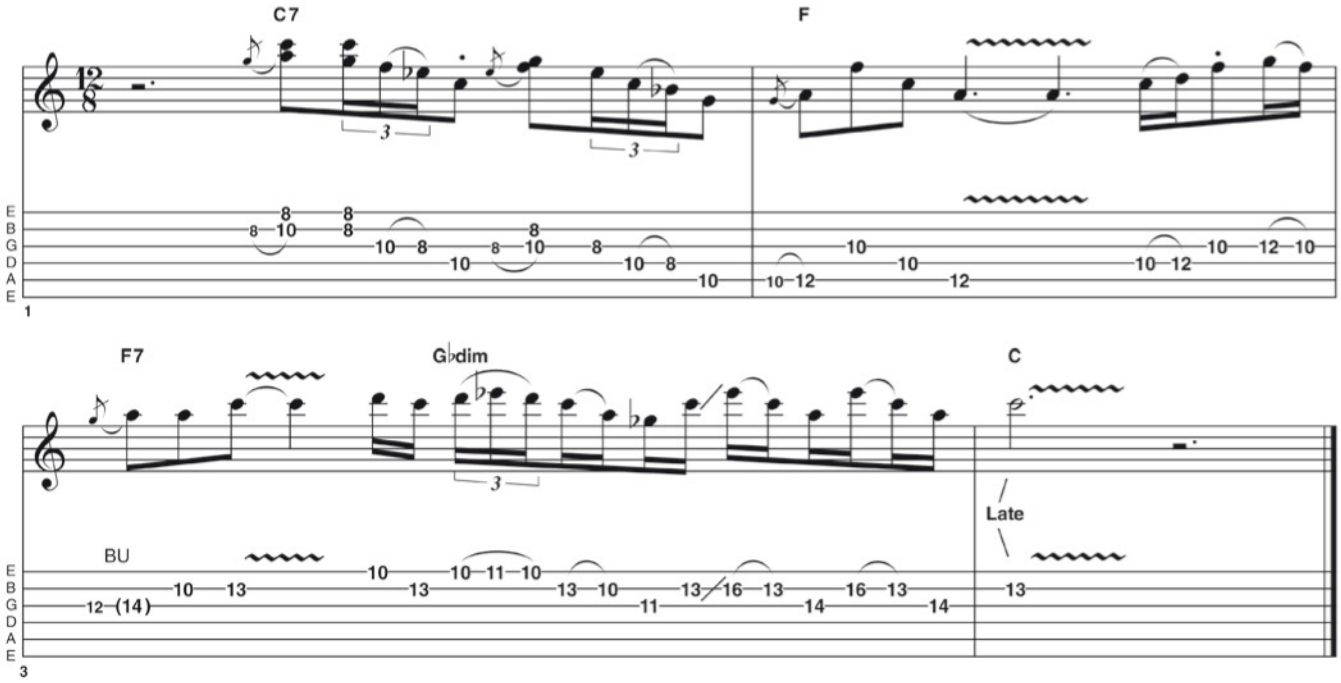
Example 1

THIS OPENING PHRASE is derived from shape 1 of the C minor pentatonic, but it moves outside that 'box' on occasion, too. Almost every instance of E♭ is pushed or pulled slightly sharp, but there are moments when the E♭ fits 'as is' (for example, in the pickup bar and over the G♭ diminished chord), so I've left these alone. Note the hammer-on from E♭ to E in the penultimate bar, stepping outside the C minor pentatonic to include the major 3rd. Check the delayed timing from here on out!



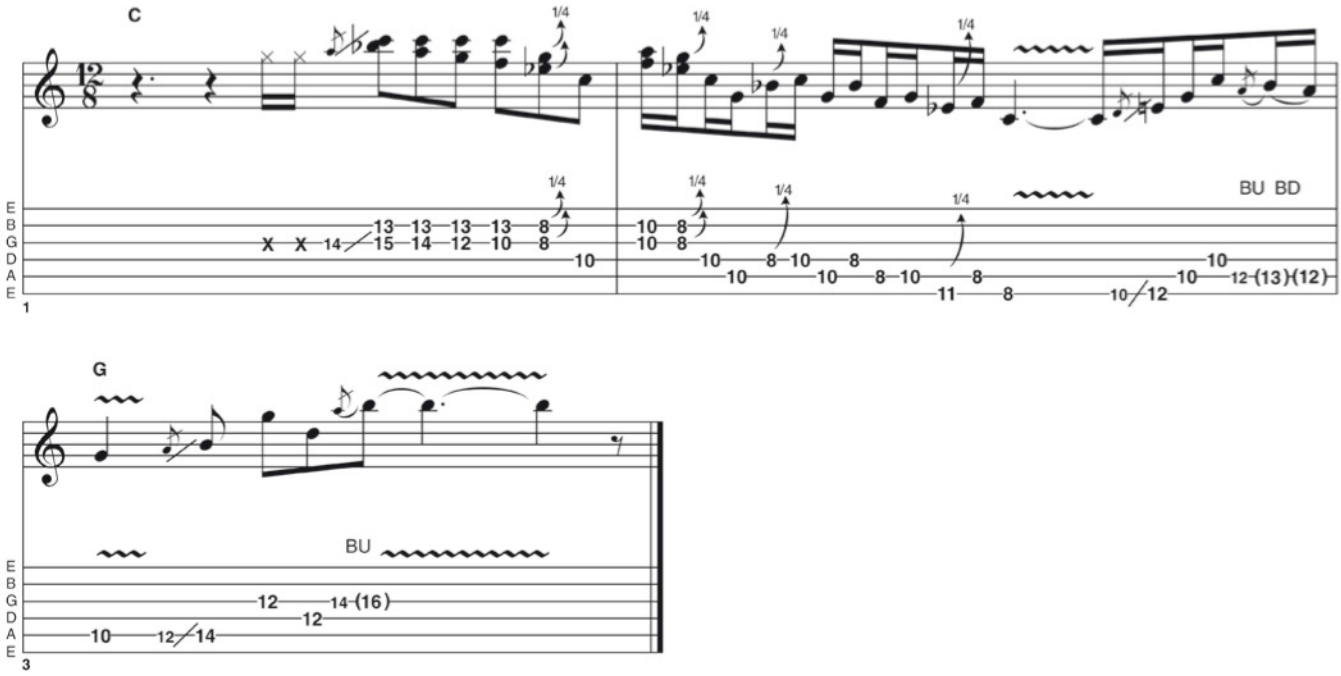
Example 2

TAKING THE SAME FLEXIBLE APPROACH to timing, we start with an SRV/John Mayer-type doublestop lick, before landing at a *Wind Cries Mary*-style F major chord. From here, we opt for a fragment of the shape 5 F major pentatonic (aka D minor pentatonic!) heading for the G♭ diminished chord. Here, I've gone with two partial diminished arpeggios (in reality, just adjacent minor 3rds), sliding the same pattern up three frets – or another minor 3rd. This final lick could also be viewed as part of a shape 3 C minor pentatonic with an added 6th (A).



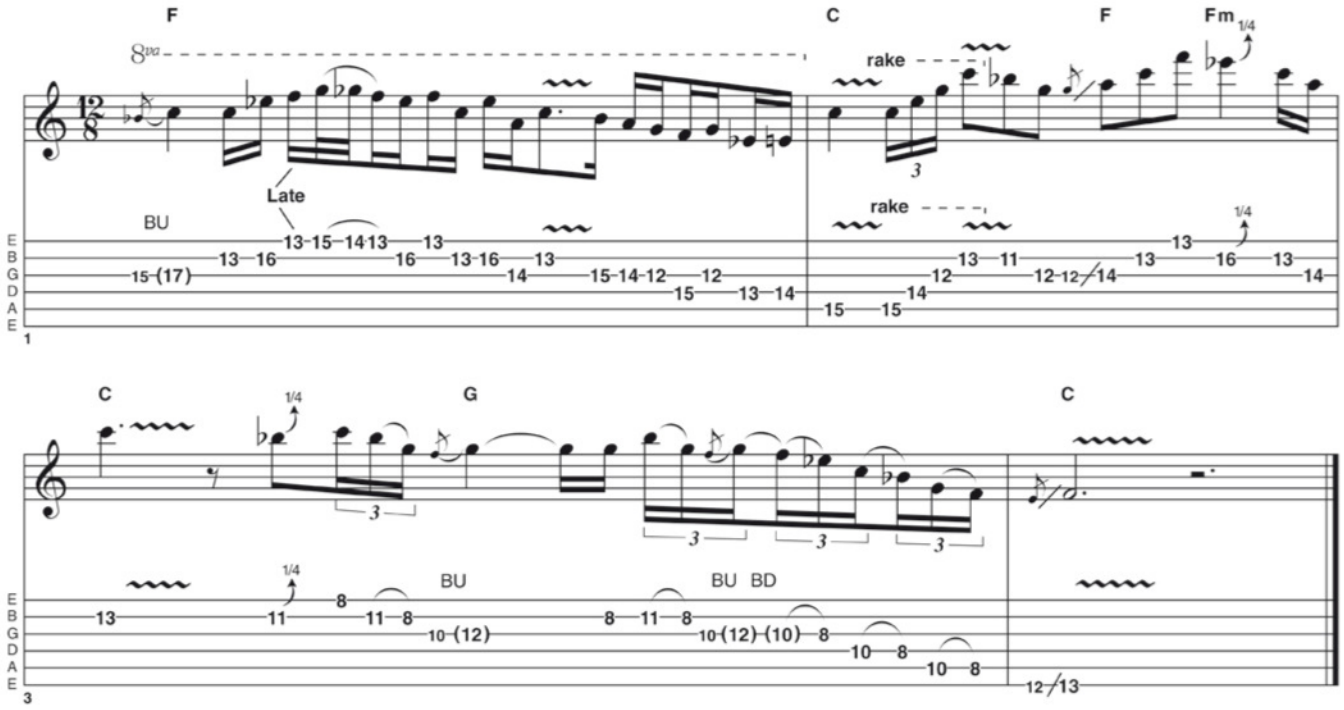
Example 3

USING SLIDING DOUBLESTOPS in the pickup bar, this phrase then switches to a shape 1 minor pentatonic approach going into bar 1, with a few pushed/pulled instances of E♭. Sliding briefly to a C major triad, we switch to a similar G major triad at the 12th fret – an unashamedly 'major' moment in a solo that has hardly committed either way up to this point! The timing here is relatively 'on-grid', but that doesn't mean it has to be.



Example 4

THERE'S A FAIR BIT GOING ON in this final phrase. First, I regard bar 1 as taken from the shape 3 C minor pentatonic with an added ♭5 (G♭), a 6th (A) and a major 3rd (E natural). Bar 2 features a C major arpeggio, which is raked through before referencing the ♭7 (B♭) then sliding up to acknowledge the change to F using a triad/partial chord at the 12th fret. The A/major 6th over the F minor is a bit of a stretch, but it works here (in my opinion!). We finish with a shape 1 C minor pentatonic resolving to E natural.



Hear It Here

BB KING
BLUES ON THE BAYOU

BB is arguably the inventor of the style we're looking at here, so check out his phrasing and note choice on *Blues Boys Tune*, *I'll Survive*, *Blues Man*, *Darlin' What Happened* and *I Got Some Outside Help I Don't Need* – or, indeed, almost any track from this late-90s release, which captures him on excellent form. Notice that BB doesn't always feel the need to unleash long strings of notes and regards the rhythm as equally important to the notes themselves.

JOHN MAYER
CONTINUUM

There is plenty of major/dominant 7th/gospel/soul phrasing to take inspiration from in this 2006 album. Check out *Gravity* where he leans heavily on intervals (and the 6th) to create a non-pentatonic-sounding melodic line with 'off-grid' timing. *Slow Dancing In A Burning Room* takes a slightly more pentatonic approach, with a few doublestops and other nice touches occurring throughout. Finally, give *I'm Gonna Find Another You* a spin to hear a more traditional approach.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN & DOUBLE TROUBLE
TEXAS FLOOD

Most readers will almost certainly know about this one already, but it remains a classic with some exemplary playing and phrasing on the title track, plus *Testify*, *Rude Mood*, *Mary Had A Little Lamb*... More uptempo and aggressive than the example solo perhaps, but the phrasing and melodic ideas will make a great fit. Honourable mention should also go to *Lenny*, a track I've cited here a number of times previously for good reason!

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